

Stanley Wade Baron

THE FACTS OF LOVE



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TO BARBARA AND HARRY
—FOR MALBORCA



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THE best way to think of Lucy is to remember what she was like the first time I saw her. Every minute since then has been changing her ; some of these changes I saw personally, many of them took place almost secretly while we were separated, and surprised me whenever we met again. But that first sight of her, those first few minutes, even days, have not changed. Preserved in my memory, that initial impression has been safe. That was always safe ; only Lucy herself was not safe.

Our meeting was, in many ways, like the beginning of a novel. She meant nothing in the world to me, occupied no place at all in my life ; in fact, I had never heard her name until suddenly, that afternoon about three, Marianne said : " Oh, dear, I almost forgot—Lucy Forlane's due in to-day ! "

It was in Paris, May 1951. There aren't many dates I can be precise about ; more important ones are vague in my mind, or else completely confused. But I can name this one without hesitation. Marianne Croyden and I—not together—were both visiting from London. I guess it must have been the long Whit week-end. In any case, we had arranged to have a drink some time during the week-end, and were sitting at the Café de la Paix when Marianne startled herself by remembering about Lucy.

" Would you be a pet and go to St. Lazare with me ? "

she asked. Being British, she had a forthright manner with people she found comfortable. With the other kind, she tended to be shy and even a trifle evasive.

"Friend of yours?" I said.

She answered with a shade of disdain. "Oh, no! Daddy's a great friend of her father—at least by mail, that is. They've never actually met, but *I've* met the family. That's where Mummy and I stayed in the States, in a great vulgar imitation-plantation kind of house full of knick-knacks and atrocious paintings."

"Where?"

"Oh, dear—I can't seem to remember. In Virginia somewhere I believe. Is there a place called Warrenton for something like that?"

"Yes, there is."

"Well, that must be it. Unless Warrenton's just a place we visited. Lucy's mother was always driving us somewhere. So much sightseeing! Washington and Mount Vernon and—heavens! I can't possibly remember all those names. Then during the summer we all had to trek to Maine where they have a summer house. I once wept about it and Mummy gave me a heart to heart about how we were poor evacuees and would I rather be in London sleeping in the underground? I said of course I'd rather be sleeping in the underground because I thought the idea of bombs was frightfully exciting. . . . But you must never repeat any of that. Mummy's rather ashamed of our having *fled*, as she puts it in her most candid moments. The feeling now is that we should have stayed and suffered like the *typical* British that we are."

I knew it was actually Marianne's 'daddy' who was ashamed of that episode, but I kept that to myself.

The boat-train was due at four. We did not have to rush, after all, so we sat back in our little iron chairs and ordered another drink. As I recall, we were drinking Pernod while everyone around us seemed to be having Coke or tea:

non-ritual tea, of course. We were sitting on the 'wrong' side of the Café—that is, we were in the place de l'Opéra. It was pleasant to be able to face the Opéra itself without making a point of it. We were just about facing the American Express office on rue de la Paix (though it was outside our view); and there was a steady flow of Americans trailing to and from the office. They would sit down at the Café and open their mail, typewritten letters one by one, generally avid, sometimes bored. I supposed that in many cases their mothers were telling them—again—to be careful, to keep their passports and money out of public view, to watch out for tramps of either sex, to guard themselves rigidly against European infections of the body or mind. A young man at the table next to ours read a letter which I liked to assume was one of these, and then very carefully applied the flame from his Zippo lighter to one corner of the airmail paper. It burnt rather slowly until near the end when it blazed into a final small magnificence and then died away. The young man looked about him, almost haughtily, for a waiter. I remember wondering why people, when they're alone, lay such stress on looking poised.

We reached the station on time, but the train was not prompt. We had to dawdle for a while before it arrived, unceremoniously, unannounced, as if it were not quite certain of its right berth.

Marianne said: "I'm not even sure I'll recognize her. I think she has light hair. . . ."

But it was I, strangely, who picked Lucy out. I was walking a little ahead of Marianne on the platform. Neither of us could see anything very clearly as passengers flowed out of the train and porters caught suitcases through the windows. What I saw finally was a girl alone, standing quite still; to my eyes she was unique in that throng. Her composure put her in relief. She looked contented and secure; a little

private smile gave her an air of amused contemplation. It was because she seemed out of place and making her own place that I felt sure she was Lucy Corlane.

That certainty of recognition is rare—and perhaps a bit mystical. I might well have made up my mind that this one was the girl—and have been wrong. There were certainly numbers of other American girls on that platform; any of them might have been Lucy. But none of them was *special*, and Lucy had to be that.

It took Marianne a moment to confirm my recognition. She led the way and took Lucy by surprise.

“Oh, I didn’t think you’d really be here!” Lucy cried out, laughing with pleasure. She accepted Marianne’s hand a little awkwardly. Maybe she wasn’t used to shaking hands with her contemporaries. And when I shook her hand at Marianne’s introduction, she expressed a further surprise. Somehow she hadn’t expected to see another American the first moment she landed in Paris.

She said this and then laughed at herself. “Everything about this trip’s been like that,” she said. “I don’t know *what* I expected, to tell the truth. Everything so far has been exactly the opposite of what I thought.” Besides the slightest shade of a Southern accent, she had a tendency to lisp, which made her seem very young.

A porter had claimed a taxi for us: a typical elderly Renault. At least, I supposed, the middle-aged driver with his beret would strike Lucy as something she had expected. But she gave no indication of noticing him.

We remembered only after we were all seated to ask where she was staying.

“It’s a hotel called the Letitia,” she said brightly.

Marianne’s face showed only a fraction of the patronizing smile she was suppressing. It was she who instructed the driver to take us to the Lutétia.

“It’s on the Left Bank, isn’t it?” Lucy asked. “That’s what they said at the agency. Mother didn’t want me to

stay on the Left Bank at all, but they said this was a very respectable hotel."

"Oh, it is," said Marianne. She sat back and drew a pack of Players out of her purse. When she offered the cigarettes, Lucy said: "No, thanks, I don't smoke."

"You know, Marianne, I didn't know whether we'd recognize each other," she went on. "We were really just little girls when you were visiting us. You've cut your hair, haven't you? So have I."

She was leaning forward in order to be able to look out of the windows. I could see how the ends of her mouth curled up. It was a thing I was always conscious of after that, for it gave her an eternal smile. That smile I had seen when she was standing on the platform. Even in her most serious moods she seemed to be smiling. It was curiously disconcerting.

"I think I'm too excited to talk!" she said.

I could see Marianne examining Lucy from her side. It was well-known to me that Marianne began with an antipathy towards Americans. She was able to overcome it, but not always: so much she had several times confessed to me. I had also once or twice observed her behaviour with American strangers. She was wary as well as ironical—but always puzzled.

Lucy, I judged, was slightly younger than Marianne. But they were not very far apart in age: Marianne twenty-four or so, Lucy probably twenty-two. In appearance, however, something very subtle and perhaps superficial separated them into different age-groups. Marianne was a young mature woman; Lucy was on the verge of still being a child. And I could tell from Marianne's eyes, as they rested on Lucy's profile, that she had immediately come to this conclusion herself.

"It certainly is different!" Lucy exclaimed, turning to me. "I mean the way it looks. It's not a bit like Washington or New York or any place I've ever seen."

"Did you expect it to be?" I asked.

"No! But I was afraid it might be. I was awfully afraid of being disappointed. But it really is different. That's what's so wonderful about the movies. This is just the way Paris looks in the movies."

Marianne remarked that the weather was fortunate. "First time I came to Paris it was raining and foggy and one might as well have stayed home. In London, I mean."

Lucy seemed to think for a minute. Then she said: "I'd love it even if it was raining or foggy."

"I guess I know what you mean," I said, for her enthusiasm reminded me of my own first visit to Paris. It did more than remind me. In some way, Lucy made me feel exactly as I did that first time. The excitement, which had been rubbed away a little by frequent visits, returned to me in flashes that I caught from her.

I found myself laughing. Marianne's puzzled look stopped me.

The hotel must have been something of a disappointment to Lucy. She had been expecting, I suppose, what the Ritz provides, or, opposing that, what can be found along any of the side-streets between the Boulevard Montparnasse and the Boulevard St. Germain: a mixture of *La Bohème* and *Sous les toits de Paris*. The Lutétia could easily have struck her as ordinary.

We went up to my room with her. The agency had done well by her, according to American tourist requirements, private bath and all. There was also a typical little balcony. At once Lucy opened the window-doors and stepped outside. Standing behind her, I realized how pleasing the view must be for her. The Sèvres-Babylone intersection may not be singular or distinguished, but that afternoon, with the sun dropping at an advantageous angle, it did seem to have a beauty for fresh eyes. Both of us could see the wide straight stretch of the Boulevard Raspail; it was at a time of day

when traffic was particularly heavy, swift and noisy. The sky, too, played its part in the scene : it was both frame and contrast.

I not only saw what I assumed Lucy was seeing ; I also had an unaccountable feeling that this view would come back to her many times in future moments of nostalgia.

She shrugged her shoulders with a sigh, as if my thought had passed through her mind, and came back into the room.

Marianne, who had been sitting quietly while we were at the window, said : " Do you have lots of people to see, Lucy ? "

" Oh, a couple of friends of friends—but I'm not going to worry about that. I just want to spend days walking around and looking at everything. I have to get so much in ! "

It appeared to me that Marianne hesitated a minute before she said, " I was wondering about this evening. You shouldn't be alone your first night in Paris. If you haven't anything to do——"

" Oh, I haven't ! Not a thing. That's what's so wonderful. "

" Well, I'm having dinner with a friend of mine. Why don't you come with us ? "

For some reason Lucy turned to me saying, " That would be lovely. "

" And what about you ? " Marianne said to me.

" Certainly, " I said. " Sounds like a fine idea. "

" I can't believe *you* don't have an engagement, " Marianne said, laughing.

" Matter of fact, I have, but it's the most unimportant thing in the world. I'll put it off. " I said what Marianne seemed to expect of me, and she was pleased.

" Shall we all meet here ? " she suggested.

Marianne's friend was Victor Widgeot, whom I had met once when she and I were having lunch together in London. He was an art critic, a member of Marianne's æsthetic-intellectual crowd. His reviews were authoritative and amusing, though the crustiness of his style made one expect

him to be elderly and portly and saturnine. On the contrary he was fairly young and excessively lean, a dandy in appearance. He had peculiarly long ears and a narrow, long, active nose. Yet not unattractive in a special British way. I thought of him as an elongated leprechaun.

He must have been frightening to Lucy at first. There was no pretence of his relating himself to the rest of us. Whatever attention he paid to Lucy was not at all flattering, for he spoke about things she could hardly have been familiar with. His world was a concentrated one of art dealers, wealthy collectors, museum directors—and an artist or two. Like most concentrated *milieux* it seemed infinitely expandable.

He was also an organizer. We must have a drink first at the hotel bar, it was such a nice, dreary place. Dinner at Prunier's. We must eat this specialty and that, avoid the *langouste* at all costs. There was a wine you could get only at Prunier's, nowhere else in Paris. None of us could contradict him, or dared.

Though the selection of dinner was out of her hands, Lucy asked about every item on the menu. "I'm going to have to learn all these things for myself," she said.

"Oh, no," I said playfully. "The thing to do is just be sure you always have a man along who knows."

"You really think so?" She looked up at me with a slightly satirical stare.

"Of course. You should always appear to be dependent."

"Oh, that's all well and good. But while that's the way you appear you have to be independent at the same time. Secretly, I mean." She laughed, showing that she was speaking on my level.

"But, really," she went on, "one of the things I'll have to do is try out my French on waiters and people. I'll be so embarrassed!"

"Well, why don't you try now?" said Victor half-heartedly. "You can give the order." I knew it was a pleasure he would hardly care to consign to another person.

"Oh, no ! I'll wait till I'm alone and *have* to."

While we spoke, I found myself studying her again. Maybe it's simply because she was so satisfying to the eye that I remember so much about her. The little ring she wore on her right hand, for instance. It had one tiny smoky pearl set in gold. She had a way of touching it from time to time: an ordinary habit. Her nails were not red, but polished their natural colour. As a matter of fact, she used very little make-up: her own colouring and complexion were good enough to need very little improvement. I looked for flaws. Was her forehead too narrow? Her eyes too far apart? Her lips too thin? She passed muster almost too easily, and made me feel that physical perfection was perhaps, after all, a possibility.

I have to admit that Victor's choice of wines was impeccable. One could only wish that he might have chosen with less bravado. He was one of those proud Englishmen whose voices are always louder abroad than at home.

He asked Lucy tauntingly what she thought of the Bordeaux, which was only a curtain-raiser.

"Oh, I don't know anything about wine," she said. "I have an uncle who makes a big fuss about it whenever we go there for dinner, but it all tastes the same to me, except when it's sweet or sour."

If she had been at all embarrassed, Victor would have had a more enjoyable time with her. As it was, he had to let the subject go. She wasn't, after all, going to be a good enough joke. I don't know whether Lucy understood any of this at the time. It always seemed that candour came naturally to her. This was not only disarming but, to quite a lot of people, upsetting.

I think, for example, that Marianne was rather upset by Lucy all through that dinner at Prunier's. In general she

had very little to say while we sat there; her role consisted largely of nodding to Victor's statements. She must have thought that there was a great lack of social hypocrisy in Lucy: a nicer way of saying that she found Lucy stupid.

Certainly it would be hard to say that we made much of a go of that dinner. There was no feeling whatsoever that we were four highly, or even vaguely, compatible people who were going to be friends. The result of this I understood only later, when I looked back on the event. It meant that, in a very short time, Lucy became *my* friend. Although I had not even known her that morning, and she had been Marianne's responsibility, by nine o'clock in the evening Lucy and I gave every appearance of long acquaintance.

But—as I say—at the time, possibly all that we were aware of was some discomfort, a sense of not fitting well together as a quartet. Victor was gallant about it, I'll say that for him. He did not, as he might have done, seek an excuse for retiring after dinner. He led us up the Champs-Élysées, sat us all down at Le Select, ordered us all Mirabelle, without asking our preference, later ordered us all coffee; in short, he acted towards us as an older uncle who had to take these youngsters in hand for an evening.

"There's certainly nothing smart about the Champs-Élysées any more," he said, while he dug between his teeth with a long finger-nail.

"Oh, but it's so beautiful!" said Lucy, her excitement making the words sound like a reproof. And that was, after all, the essential fact: that the breadth of the Champs-Élysées, the trees leading straight up and down from the Arc de Triomphe, the shops, the movie houses, the multitudes of people who seemed to be always *en fête*, all melted into a unique beauty. It was a sight that deserved to be hackneyed, made over-familiar on post cards. It was only Lucy, feeling this excitement which had long gone for the rest of us individually, who could have said that.

"But I try to see it as it must have been fifty years ago,"

said Victor. "Think of the coaches, the horses, the flirtations, the old *roués* with their sticks—and the young ones, too. . . ."

Lucy protested. He was trying to spoil it for her, but he couldn't, she said.

Her smile responded to him by becoming serene. It was simply that she could not help enjoying what her eyes took in that very Saturday night in May. Probably she was not especially interested in history, nor literary enough to have any previous pictures of the Champs-Élysées. Even I, in all truth, had indulged in fantasies like Victor's; and I, too, had imagined that in 1900 all we were looking at must have been infinitely more beautiful and subtle and gracious. I had even decided that the Champs-Élysées was tawdry, only a shabby reminder of former elegance; that the women were not dressed well, the tarts were fat and obvious, the shops were garish.

But that evening Lucy was right. She somehow set the scene afresh and I saw, without any difficulty at all, what she meant.

The idea that I was simply very attracted to Lucy and willing to accept anything she said almost dotingly, is not a matter of retrospection. It occurred to me then—and surprised me. All that she had said so far had been, I confessed to myself, utterly trivial and banal. She had shown no indications of a searching or tutored or unusual mind. It was even possible that she was stupid, as I suspected Marianne thought her.

Nevertheless, she had a quality which stimulated me. Even more: I thought of it as a quality that must stimulate anyone who came into contact with her. I wondered whether she herself was aware of it.

"You know what?" she said, and looked almost concerned. "I'm feeling the motion of the boat right now. Isn't that funny?"

"Were you seasick?" I asked.

"Oh, no. It was smooth as silk. Anyway, I've done lots

of sailing and never been sick. So I didn't really expect to be, although that long slow roll of a big ship is a little different."

"I'm the world's *worst* sailor," said Victor, apparently set on distinction at any price.

"Well, there *were* people who were sick. I met such a nice Frenchwoman—Madame Brunot was her name. That reminds me, I'm supposed to call her up and see her. But what I mean is she was sick one whole day when the weather was absolutely perfect. No kidding, that day I hardly even felt as if we were moving. She said it just always happens to her and that's all there is to it. She simply expects it. An American boy at our table kept on saying it was only mild over matter, but then he missed one meal, too. Said he was hung over. . . . People are funny on ships. This American boy, for instance, he kept on telling us he had crossed the Atlantic six times, and he told us he'd been on a different ship each time. He just went on and on about the food on this one and the service on that one and how long it takes and all that. As if we cared! You know who are the nicest people on ships?—the stewards. They were real, cute."

I began to visualize Lucy on the ship, at table, on deck, in the lounges. She must have had many admirers, people buying her drinks, smiling at her as she passed, and seeking her out whenever she was not immediately evident. I wondered whether all her life had been like that: the world at her service. Would she have recognized that? It was impossible for me to tell, for she had no air of conceit.

Marianne was becoming restless. The parade of people up and down the Champs-Élysées held no charm for her. I don't think she cared much for the French, in any case. One of the things that made Marianne seem older than her years was her xenophobia. I, at least, associated that attitude of mind with red-faced colonels or Kensington widows—and their American counterparts.

She felt, she said, that we should go somewhere else. Somewhere, she said, that would be more exciting for Lucy. Victor, she said, always knew the right places.

And Victor did. Especially when challenged, he did. He took us in hand again. Across the river once more in a taxi, with Lucy exclaiming about Paris in the evening. We descended many steps into many *caveaux*. We breathed dense air, harsh air mixed with aromatic French cigarette-smoke.

Lucy was enchanted. The music was wonderful; she wanted to dance like the little French couples who were so energetic in so little space. But none of us could dance with her, at least not in *that* style, not the French *jitterbug*. But she was feeling gay and the unattached Frenchmen were not unsusceptible to her quality.

We, the other three, unassimilated and rooted around our table, watched her dance with a young French soldier. Then another. They were handsome dark boys, the two of them. *Copains*, no doubt, they noisily shared her back and forth, baring their teeth with happiness.

Marianne complained about the din, but Victor was fascinated. It was, for him, like watching primitive natives; his attitude was both æsthetic and anthropological. He looked as if he considered this spectacle a subject he might be able to talk about afterwards, with a scholar's patronizing wit.

It seemed to me that Lucy was getting perhaps a little too excited. During breaks in the music she came, red-faced and hot, back to our table and sipped at brandy and soda. "They're such *good* dancers!" she exclaimed, sounding eager to continue. And then the two soldiers would be back, laughing and embarrassed, bowing a little, and she would go back on the floor.

I think all of us except Marianne were feeling slightly intoxicated. The crush of people, the smoke, and—certainly not least—the brandy were having their effect on us. Victor began to keep time with the music by pounding on the

table. Marianne told him to hush, and he tapped on his glass instead.

"It's all so frightfully naïve," he said inappropriately. He probably would have liked to dance, but the barrier between him and the "performance" never quite broke down. I suppose even tourists watching American Indian ritual dances get caught up in the movement and have an impulse (which they suppress) to participate.

Marianne finally decided it was time for her to go. "These places are so tiring," she complained. I thought of crowded and noisy and smelly pubs she and I had been to in London, but didn't mention them.

I managed to get hold of Lucy to ask her whether she wanted to go; but she cried, "Oh, not yet!" and was whisked out of earshot. From Marianne's point of view this was rude behaviour. She gave me a private sympathetic smile and rose.

"You won't mind taking her to the hotel, will you?" she said sweetly to me. "It's not far from where you are."

"'Course I don't mind."

"Going, are we?" said Victor. "Why the rush?"

Marianne didn't bother to answer.

Victor fussed with his wallet. "I suppose it'll be some thing like two thousand francs, old man. Let me know" to-morrow if that's not enough." It was really too noisy for me to refuse the money.

Marianne managed to look very British as she pushed her way towards the steps. Behind her, Victor, long and elegant, watched the dancers until the very last moment when he disappeared through the doorway.

When they were gone a young French girl with black bangs cadged a Pernod off me and asked a lot of irrelevant questions which I answered with only half my attention. She wanted to know why all Americans were so *kind*, so thoroughly *amiable*. She had known many, she whispered right up against my ear, oh yes, many Americans, young

and old. She rather made a specialty of them, she confided. In her room she had, ah, so many presents they had given her—cheap things, expensive things, even books. Sometimes she was taken for an intellectual, she told me. Was I an intellectual? Because American intellectuals were extremely kind, she'd always found. If they thought a girl was an intellectual they'd do anything. They also talked such a lot, and she was one girl who adored listening to other people talking—especially Americans. There were girls who didn't care a fig for Americans. . . .

She ceased her chatter abruptly and moved discreetly away when Lucy came back to the table. But I could see her hovering nearby, ready to slip back in case Lucy should leave. She made me feel like an exposed target.

"They're *such* cute fellows," Lucy said breathlessly. "The two soldiers, I mean. They don't seem as young and silly as Americans that age."

"You know their age?"

"Oh, yes!" she laughed. "Emile's twenty and Maurice is twenty-one."

"You've exchanged names?"

"Well, *naturally*! They speak the *worst* English, so we say a little of my French and a little English and then we break down."

I said: "Yes, there's never much future in that kind of conversation." I somehow didn't like her getting along so well so quickly.

"Emile's got his father's car and he says I ought to go up to the top of Monmar—is that right?—and watch the sun come up. Isn't that a cute idea?"

I tried to be cautious. "Well, as an idea. . . . But, after all, they *are* strangers. Do you think——"

She visibly subsided. Not with any anger or petulance, but quite peacefully. "Yes, you're right," she said. "They were such fun I kind of forgot."

She turned to smile gratifyingly at me. "Isn't it lucky

you're here to look after me? Oh, where are Marianne and her friend?"

"They left a little while ago. Marianne was tired."

"Isn't that awful! Did I do something wrong? I guess I shouldn't have danced so much."

"No, no," I said. "Don't worry about that. I just think this isn't what Marianne would call her cup of tea."

"Oh, but it's such *fun*! I'll have to call her to-morrow. Really, it's terrible of me. After she was so nice to come and meet me at the station and everything. . . ."

The soldiers shyly came back to claim her. She managed them very nicely, even adroitly. Amid much laughter, she explained that she really had to go home. She spoke English very slowly to them and they seemed to me to understand only as much as they wanted to. I felt very much in their way, but was perfectly content to be in that position. They could have given her a hard time, left to their own devices.

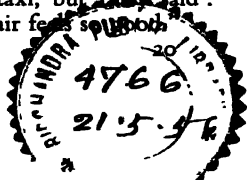
I decided that I'd have to say something to Lucy later about such things. But would I really?

They left reluctantly, the two of them, looking very much like boys in costume. They promised they would telephone the next day; maybe Emile would have the car again and they could drive into the country. (There was something in their manner that made it perfectly evident I wasn't included in the invitation.)

Yes, Lucy answered them, that would be lovely. They must phone. By all means.

It was really very difficult to tell whether she meant it or was letting them down easily in the typical way of charming young girls—with promises that had no validity. I could see that the boys weren't at all certain.

When we came out into the street again, it was fairly deserted. Paris looked all at once like a lonely place. I started for a taxi, but Lucy said: "Can't we walk for a while? The air feels so good."



We were, in fact, close enough to the Lutétia to walk there. Yes, she wanted to do that. She wasn't in the least sleepy.

I don't remember whether I was or not, but I know I would have been perfectly willing to say I was not, for her sake.

As we started out I felt that I had been a little too avuncular down there in the 'cave.' I could have told myself that she was actually an adult and responsible only to herself for her decisions.

In order, I guess, to mitigate any feeling she might have had that I was a wet blanket, I said: "Look, if you really want to watch the dawn from Sacré-Cœur I'll be glad to—"

"Oh, no!" she interrupted. "That was just the boys' idea. I don't have to see everything my first night."

"I just don't want you to feel I held you back."

"I wouldn't feel *that*," she said. "What happened was I sort of ran away with myself. It's happened to me before." She chuckled softly. "That's why I should always have someone like you around."

It suddenly occurred to me that she hadn't very much more reason for putting her faith in me than in the soldiers. Nothing more than social convention—the fact that she had met me through a friend—allowed her to feel confidence. Besides, that friend wasn't a close one.

"I simply get carried away sometimes with people my own age," she explained, deflating me utterly. It affronted me to have her think of me as older. I was only thirty. I was sure Marianne didn't regard me as outside her generation. As a way of proving my youth, I felt for an inane moment that I should scramble up one of the trees we passed.

"It's so amazing," Lucy was saying. "This is just what I thought it would be like. You know—I'm back on that same business of what you expect something to be like and what it turns out to be *really*."

"Yes."

"Well, this kind of night—these places we went to and

now walking here along the street—"well, it's all the way I pictured it."

"Only you never pictured *me*," I said.

She turned her face to me and laughed. "You can be sure there was always *somebody* next to me in my pictures. Sometimes I was walking alone, but not very often. Don't you always imagine things with other people even if you don't know who they are?"

I tried to give this notion serious consideration. "I'm not sure that I'm much given to visualizing the future. But I must admit I did have a picture of Paris before I saw it."

"I'm glad you did," she said warmly. "Otherwise I'd feel like a freak or something. I wouldn't want to be the only person in the world with pictures in my mind."

Again we walked silently for a little while before she asked what it was we had been drinking.

"*Fine à l'eau*," I said.

"What's that?"

"Brandy and water—or soda."

"Really? I feel a little—well, you know—*happy*—lightheaded. I was just going to tell you a great secret."

"Won't you?"

She laughed again. "I probably will, though I shouldn't. After all, I don't know you very well."

"D'you feel that you don't?"

"Well, of course I don't. I feel as if I *will* know you well. But we haven't even talked about what you do or where you live or anything like that."

"But those things *aren't* very important," I said. "I'll tell you all about them to-morrow. But in the meantime—what's your secret?"

We were just approaching St. Sulpice. I can remember not being quite sure how we had arrived there. The square, empty of people and yet lighted like an exhibition, seemed entirely disengaged from Paris. And Lucy and I, crossing through the square as if we were actors in a huge movie-set,

were also disengaged from the rest of the world. Maybe it was only because of these factors that she was able to speak as she did.

"It's a plain silly idea," she said. "But whenever I've pictured Paris, as we were saying, I used to see myself meeting up with a fascinating Frenchman and being swept right off my feet and being happy and miserable—and everything!"

I said, "That's probably exactly what will happen."

"Oh, I doubt it. Things like that don't happen to me. I mean, men make passes at me. After all——"

"Yes?"

"Well, I mean, men just *do*. At anybody. But what I visualized was quite different. It's just that I always thought of Paris as so romantic. The way everybody does—you know what I mean. Love in Paris and all that. . . ."

"Yes, I know what you mean. The way it's advertised."

I really considered what she was saying quite silly, as she herself had described it. Young and silly. From the way she spoke, one would have thought she was unattractive, lacking in appeal. Unless this were some kind of guile (and I knew for certain that it wasn't) it made me realize that she actually was unaware of her quality. I could have told her there, at that very moment, how special she was, how easy it would be for men—French or otherwise—to fall in love with her. But I didn't dare to go deeply. I preferred to laugh and make her laugh.

I assured her she could be seduced at the drop of a hat. The hardest thing would be for her to avoid it.

"Oh, but it's *love* I'm talking about," she said.

"Yes, I know." She embarrassed me by being simple.

I saw only later that I didn't really understand what she was trying to explain. It struck me as strange—not just in line with her natural candour—for her to have said these things to me. Yet she managed to say them without seeming carnal. Certainly I had no impression that she was inviting me to make a fool of myself. In a way, her remarks set me

right outside the picture. Confidants never seduce. It was like a maxim.

We said no more. There were no conclusions to be hammered home. At the hotel I asked whether I should call for her the next day.

"Oh, yes!" she said enthusiastically. "Why don't you come over around eleven—unless you're tied up or something."

"I'm not tied up or anything."

"Oh, good. Come at eleven. And thank you, thank you, *thank* you for everything. It was just perfect. And Paris is just perfect!"

She kissed me : a niece-like kiss.

I remember just about a year after that night when she told me that Paris was, after all, a terrible city and she could never live there again.

And now, only a short time ago when I saw her, she was saying that it might be nice to spend a week in Paris, it had been such a long time since she'd seen it.

These changes in people are so interesting to me.

{ Two }

IT was probably just as well that Marianne phoned early the next morning and woke me. I might easily have overslept, otherwise. The feeble and irritating bell caught me deep in a dream. When I reached for the receiver, I was out of focus and remained that way for a few minutes, only saying yes or shaking my head.

In that state I found Marianne aggressively chipper. She was checking to see that everything had gone all right the night before. Her voice was full of sharp prickling sounds as she apologized for leaving me with Lucy. "But, really," she said, "those places are a bit much. I've done the rounds with Victor once before, but I must say I'd forgot how hellish they can be."

"I enjoyed *myself*, anyway," I said. "And I'm sure Lucy did."

"Good," said Marianne, with practically no conviction. "What I really rang up for was to say that I'm going back to London to-day."

I was confused. "It's Sunday, isn't it?"

"Of course—but I called Mummy a little while ago and she says there's a do on at the Denby-Frasers' to-night for some theatre people and I think I'd rather like to go. Haven't been to a decent party in ages."

"Oh, I see. Well—what time do you leave?"

"In half an hour."

"Oh——" I felt at a loss. "Then I won't be able to see you off."

"I wasn't counting on you, my pet, but you are sweet to mention it. I'll just nip over to the Gare des Invalides in a taxi. It's really perfectly simple."

"Yes. . . . Well, have a good time," I said lamely. "I'll be back myself on Monday night. To-morrow, that is."

"Perfect! Ring me up, won't you?"

"Certainly will."

"And be a dear and explain to Lucy for me. Not that it will make any difference to her, but—you know . . ."

"Yes, of course, Marianne. Well—good-bye."

"Bye."

It was odd that, although we had not come to Paris together or made any other plans than the drink we'd had the day before, I felt peculiarly left behind. I guess I had really counted on seeing something more of Marianne in spite of the fact that she was always likely, in Paris, to be tied up with her father's or her own literary friends. Perhaps it was just because she hadn't been able to tie herself up that she left.

My next call came while I was shaving. It was Victor. He'd never phoned me before: it was a vaguely pleasant surprise.

Apparently he'd just been speaking to Marianne, too. "I say, I feel rather let down," he said. "Had all sorts of plans for to-day. Now that Marianne's gone and *foutu le camp* it leaves one up in the air."

He waited for me to say something, but I let him go on.

"What are *you* doing?" he finally asked.

"Nothing very definite."

"And that girl of yours—Lucy?"

I had to laugh. "I only met her yesterday," I said.

"Did you really? I should have thought you were——"

"No, not at all. She's really Marianne's friend."

"Is she *really*?"

"Yes. Anyway, I'm meeting her at eleven and we'll——"

"Are you?" he said in a rush. "That's fine then. I'll pop along to the Lutétia and we'll all have a late bun and coffee. Eleven you said?"

"Well, yes." I felt hesitant, in fact reluctant, but couldn't very well tell him not to come.

"See you then," he said and hung up.

I don't think I felt very much like seeing Victor that morning. I didn't want to be organized; I didn't want Lucy to be organized. But people like Victor are hard to withstand. For one thing they talk fast enough to get ahead of you. They're slippery customers—these Victors. They're always putting one over on you.

And why was he being so innocent about Lucy? I realized that Marianne must have told him about her before we all met at the Lutétia.

It was annoying, but I could only wait and see. I went back to my shaving and cut myself badly just under my left ear—no, the left ear in the mirror, really my right ear. I blamed it on Victor.

When I reached the Lutétia it was about ten minutes before eleven. I was told that Lucy was already in the dining-room.

She was indeed. Like a hostess she sat pouring coffee for her two soldiers.

"They came half an hour ago," she said to me, laughing at the situation.

"Oh, really?"

They rose and gave me an inhospitable look. Lucy effected some vague introductions and we all sat down together. I couldn't help being amused by their tenacity as well as their hostile disappointment at seeing me.

"How about breakfast?" Lucy asked.

"Yes, I think I'll have a big one—eggs and all."

"Good. That's what I had."

Fortunately, the waiter and the kitchen were injured to

Americans who ate at all hours of the day. It was not something they themselves would have done. But there it was—their only purpose was to serve. In a British hotel some severe waiter or haughty waitress would have said, "I'm sorry, sir; breakfast is only served until half-past nine." I was glad I was in Paris.

"Emile has the car again," Lucy said to me.

Emile smiled. I noticed that he was trying to grow a moustache. In the light of morning both boys seemed even younger. And quite harmless.

"Well, that's nice." I couldn't think of anything else to say. It was not going to be easy to get rid of the boys and remain polite.

"Coffee, Maurice?" Lucy was looking entirely refreshed. I wondered if Maurice enjoyed her lisp as much as I did. His name was perfect for it.

"*Merci.*" He held out his cup.

What a silly little scene it was! Looking back on it I feel as if we were all playing house. It was as if all the cups and saucers were miniature, made of plastic—a set Lucy had been given for her birthday. But if she was playing Mama, my only role could have been Grandpapa. Playing house doesn't usually get that complicated.

"*Vous parlez français, monsieur?*" Emile asked me. Just to make sure, I suppose.

It seemed easier to admit that I did. I didn't want him to think that he and his pal were going to have an easy time putting something over on me.

He explained that they wanted to take Lucy for a drive. It was such a warm day, he said. They were both very careful drivers. In fact, he himself drove a truck for the Army. And had never had an accident. (He crossed himself.) Otherwise his father would never let him have the car. His father was a wine merchant. Yes, the firm's name was Fournois, Fils. Over that way near the Jardin des Plantes.

I realized gradually that he was asking my permission to take Lucy away ; maybe he took me for a relative. In another minute he would be showing me his papers.

Victor saved me from that. His long face, when he arrived, was lively with confusion. He had known he would not be alone with Lucy, but certainly he had not expected a *party*.

The boys rose again, stiffly.

"What's this all about ?" Victor asked me while he smiled briefly at the soldiers. "The Tweedle brothers ?"

"Don't you remember them ?"

"Last night ? Of course. My dear Lucy, what have you done ?"

"I had not had a chance to tell her that Victor was barging in. She glanced at me for clarification. The two boys, more than ever crestfallen, looked at her for the same reason.

"Isn't this nice ?" she said. "Will you have breakfast ?"

"No, no !" Victor sat down next to her. Since I was on her other side, Emile and Maurice were effectively cut off.

Victor said : "I'll just have a *croissant* if there's one going."

The waiter, who had just brought my eggs, was dispatched again.

"What a dancer you are, my dear," said Victor to Lucy.

"Watching you made me itch—positively itch."

"Why didn't you dance ?" Lucy asked.

"Oh, you know how we English are. Reserved—inhibited." He guffawed.

"I'll bet you're not."

"Not underneath it all. No, of course we're not. Inside we're all *seeeee*thing. . . . Or so they say. At any rate, my dear, wouldn't you rather have it that way than the other way round, like the Latins. All the activity on the outside, and inside—only *organs* !"

Lucy only laughed, stating no preference.

"I see," said Victor. "You think I'm not serious. That's really my exterior, the business of making people laugh."

"No, I was just thinking I didn't want to hear about organs at this time of day."

Victor might have been fairly launched but for the two French boys who were frankly glaring at him.

"Blast!" he said. "I can't have these two little monsters staring at me."

In very good rapid French he asked the boys to follow him out into the lobby as he had something to tell them. Puzzled, they rose. Victor was commanding as well as slippery. There was nothing for them to do but go after him. I was able to sympathize with their evident discomfiture.

Lucy was extremely amused. "He's a scream, isn't he? What do you suppose he's doing?"

"I have no idea," I said.

"By the way, have you heard from Marianne yet?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact it was Marianne who woke me this morning—bright and early. She's gone."

"Gone? What do you mean?"

"Back to London. There was some party she wanted to go to."

"And I never called her!" Somehow Marianne's change of plan managed to put each of us out.

"Don't worry," I said. "She told me to explain to you."

"Explain what?"

"Oh—her abrupt departure—you know. People are ~~always~~ saying do you mind explaining to somebody. . . It doesn't mean anything really. . . ."

Victor came back alone, his face expressing nothing.

"What did you do?" Lucy asked.

He sat down and broke his *croissant* before answering. Then he said: "I told them you were a mental case and that we had come to take you away. Quietly."

"You *didn't*!" Lucy rocked back and forth in her chair with laughter.

"Well, not really. Not *literally*, that is. I hinted delicately, let's say. * Called you a *malheureuse*. Very painful affair.

Family hysterical. What not. But isn't it better without them? Of course it is. Much better.

"Now, my dear, what shall we do to-day? You have no plays?"

"No," said Lucy. "Only at five o'clock I have something. That woman on the boat. I called her and she asked me to come over to her house then."

Victor frowned. "Why did you do *that*? Shipboard acquaintances should be forgot while you're coming down the gangway. Never cling, my dear, you mustn't cling."

"She was very nice," Lucy protested.

"Quite. Oh, well, we'll all go round and have a drink and a dull old gossip, and then we'll have a smashing dinner by ourselves."

Victor rolled over us like a bulldozer.

We went to Versailles (because Victor wanted to go), and Lucy and I learned a great deal from him. Or could have learned, I should say, because I don't believe either of us absorbed very much. Nevertheless, one had to be impressed by his erudition. He showed a great joy in knowing so many facts. It was not exactly his impressing us that pleased him; in a way, he appeared to be pleasing himself.

"D'you know, I was five when I first came here," said Victor. "Nanny brought me—my parents were probably off doing something wicked. No, not really—neither of them ever did anything wicked in their lives. Too unimaginative. But what I mean to say is that Nanny made up all kinds of little stories the day we came—she had a very usual kind of fantasy. It was all about fairy princesses and giants and dashing knights. And you know—in spite of everything else I still see Versailles that way. Inane, isn't it? I still expect a long-haired princess to be weeping by the fountains, and the giants—well, maybe I've finally recovered from the giants."

"Poor old Nanny, I suppose she herself never really

believed that actual people used to live here. Not that she ever thought of royalty as actual people. She had absolutely no sense of history."

It was certainly a very personal tour we took that day. Victor was full of a sense of history—including his own. At *this* spot he had fallen in love with an unknown girl; at *that* he had proposed to an English girl named Felicity, whose father had been a lowly baronet. He made it sound as if his whole life had been played out within the gardens of Versailles.

The only personal note I might have inserted was that I had once spent a very unhappy hour in the gardens looking for a toilet. But I really didn't want to compete with Victor.

We wandered with the Sunday crowds. We had ice cream in cones. Later, before taking the train back, we sat at a café and ate sausage and drank beer.

I remember the sun and Lucy's dark glasses. She smiled, she laughed, occasionally she looked serious while Victor was being serious. It was all very easy and pleasant: a perfect model of sightseeing.

We arrived for Lucy's appointment a bit late, but it hardly mattered at all since it turned out to be a little party. Somehow I had not been prepared for a magnificent apartment near the Palais de Chaillot, nor for the stylish and exuberant woman that Mme Brunot turned out to be. I realize now that Lucy had never mentioned the fact that she had been travelling First Class; and when I had visualized the woman who had been sick I had thought of quite a different kind of person. Someone older, plainer, very much less wealthy.

Mme Brunot was, first of all, distinctly striking in appearance. She was dressed, as most Frenchwomen of her class would be, to the hilt. Her hair was blonde, fashionably dyed. Her eyes, too small perhaps in their natural condition, were magnified with pencil and shadow; they had, besides, natural dark circles that made her look intriguingly dissipated. She was tall, with thick arms and bosom. What was most

interesting about her, and most typical, was that she triumphed over a grossness of feature and build by dressing fantastically and conducting herself with extraordinary flair and poise.

She greeted Lucy—and then Victor and me—with gusto. Many *ma chères*, many exclamations. She gesticulated broadly, held her diamonded fingers to her breast, laughed heartily, shook hands heartily. She was very refreshing.

In the large sitting-room, furnished in the most expensive and hideous style of 1920's modern, everyone seemed to be shouting: "*Mais certainement !*" "*Evidemment !*" "*Parfaitement !*" The French are so vehement and precise in agreeing with one another.

It was an assorted group we were introduced to—about eight or nine people. The one I remember best, of course, is Daniel Nordale, the artist. Victor was especially pleased to have the chance to speak to him. There was a rather bony lady who wore clusters of bangles on her arms; she was somehow connected with the Comédie Française. A banker called d'Albert kissed Lucy's hand. There was also the host, M. Brunot, himself, I think, a banker: a broad man with a waxed moustache who just managed to be larger than his wife.

From either predilection or inability, nobody spoke English. Though the three of us were outnumbered and could hardly have expected such deference to be shown us, it did make the conversations a little hard to follow. I don't suppose Victor had any difficulty. From time to time I could see him going hammer and tongs at Nordale, while the artist smilingly inclined his head.

Lucy and I managed to stay close by Mme Brunot who talked, it seemed, to everyone at once. Occasionally she patted Lucy's hand and asked how she liked Paris.

She asked the question three times, as a matter of fact.

Lucy didn't understand at all, but her smile stood her in good stead. Mme Brunot answered all her own questions. But, of course, Lucy loved Paris! One could see that. And no doubt she had seen lots of friends and many young men.

Wasn't it different from America? But certainly it was. Lucy would soon discover.

I asked Mme Brunot whether it had been her first trip to the States. -

She laughed, Oh, no ! She went every year, she had so many good friends in New York. What an amazing city ! And just to show how well she knew America, she had dry martinis prepared for us. A butler passed around the tray. There were four martinis, I saw ; one was for an adventurous lady well over sixty who would always try anything.

I explained that Widdett was British, not American.

Tant mieux ! Mme Brunot was extremely pleased : ' she was particularly fond of the British. She had always found London intensely fascinating. Before the war it had been so gay, so stylish. When they still had India.

Now, of course—she shook her head indulgently. Like everything else it had changed. All the big houses being turned into flats. No parties. Nothing in the shops. And the grey bread. . . .

Quickly she smiled again : but change was a good thing, wasn't it ? One wouldn't care for everything to remain exactly the same from one year to the next. Life would lose its excitement.

It was easy to see that Mme Brunot was one of those people who naturally find life exciting. With her lively eyes and active hands, she looked capable of extracting excitement out of situations in which duller people would find none. Whether she was the kind who went a step farther and created excitement, I couldn't say. Certainly she created a kind of electricity around her. But that was something she couldn't control : it was doubtless inherent in her.

Somehow, after the first half-hour, we were shifted. It was imperceptible and seemingly accidental. But I had a feeling it was all improvised by Mme Brunot. I was talking to the adventurous older lady : she proved to be Nordale's mother. It was only an exceptionally lined skin that gave

her age away. Her voice was firm and young ; she did not dress in what could be called an elderly way.

Mme Nordale was sorry not to speak English—but, oh, the Americans all spoke such excellent French !

“ My son has many American visitors,” she told me. And smilingly added :

“ And American patrons. They are so interesting, the American buyers. They seem so anxious to take a chance with new painters. Of course Daniel is hardly a *new* painter.” She looked admiringly towards her son, who was still submitting to Victor’s lecture.

She turned back to me and gazed at my shaving wound. With a little embarrassment she asked me who Victor was.

When I explained, she looked again in their direction. Then, apparently satisfied, she said she thought she’d try another dry martini—it was a pleasant but strange taste.

The woman from the Comédie Française asked whether I had seen the new production : the Gide “ Caves du Vatican.”

No, I had not. But a woman next to us had, and she proceeded to give her opinion of it.

I moved away and, standing alone, looked at leisure around the large room. I wondered why the Brunots had not redecorated, or did this décor represent a period in which they had been especially happy ? The room had a curiously preserved look about it, as if they had gone to special pains to duplicate worn-out pieces, had the ugly square armchairs re-upholstered in appropriate materials. Even the paintings hung profusely on the walls had a period quality. And they were all capped by a typical Van Dongen society portrait of the young Mme Brunot, bobbed and powdered and pursing her lips.

It was strange that the twenties already produced nostalgia. Symbolizing better times, happier times, freer times. They meant nothing to me—the twenties—out of personal experience. Yet even I tended to regard the period as a kind of heyday of people with money. Reckless people at any

Ritz bar, or driving huge cars along the Riviera, behaving disgracefully at parties : a mixture of American heiresses and penniless Princes. I wondered whether the *feeling* of life had been any different then.

Victor finally joined me, leaving Lucy and Nordale alone together.

"Why were you browbeating the poor man?" I asked.

"What do you mean? I admire him prodigiously! Matter of fact I do think his latest work has been going in the wrong direction. But he said he'd rather been feeling that himself."

"What kind of work does he do?"

"That's just it," Victor said. I waited while he lighted a cigarette. Like the rest of him, his fingers were long and thin, and peculiarly flat—like string beans. "Nordale's capable of anything, that's his real problem. His work's eclectic—draws magnificently—colour as good and exciting as Matisse—technique like Dali if he wants it—and the abstracts absolutely first class."

I laughed. "You make him sound like a plagiarist."

"Oh, no! His great gift is a sense of fantasy. That's what's going to last, because it's personal, brilliant, and very original. Like Ensor, you know, he's got a world entirely his own. Sometimes it's rather too gruesome; he did a series of war pictures that were a little too *strong*. All imagined, of course, because in fact he sat out the war in the south of France. But he'd put things behind barbed wire, for instance, that were appallingly disturbing—yellow faces and disembodied teeth and obelisks. . . . Very unrealistic and yet—well it's rather hard to explain."

"I'm surprised. I should have thought you could explain anything."

Victor was pleased.

"Do I really give that impression?" he asked coyly.

"Oh, absolutely! Complete articulateness."

"I say—isn't that astute of you?"

What interested me most at the moment was that Lucy and Nordale seemed to be finding such a lot to talk about. I had no reason to rate Lucy's opinion of modern art very highly. Unless she'd taken a remarkably sophisticated course in college on the subject, I couldn't see that she would know the difference between a Braque and a Vuillard—or that she would care very much. Yet there they were, Lucy smiling seriously, Nordale speaking in a relaxed way with attractively expressive hand gestures. Very much engrossed in each other.

Victor must have followed my gaze.

"Hitting it off nicely, aren't they?" he murmured.

"Does he speak English?" I asked.

"I'm quite sure he does. The name's odd, isn't it? Sounds vaguely Scandinavian. Of course he is rather fair for a full-blooded Frenchman. Really I'm ashamed not to know more about him."

"Unmarried?"

"Yes. Talk has it he's overdevoted to *maman*, the dear old thing on the settee over there."

"I spoke to her for a minute," I said. "She didn't seem exactly a dragon."

"Oh, no!" said Victor. "That's not the implication at all. It's different amongst the French somehow. One hates to admit not understanding everything but I must confess French family relationships are quite beyond me."

"I *am* glad, Victor, that there's something you don't understand."

He frowned. "I don't know whether that's meant to be pleasant or not. You don't impress me as having a sharp tongue."

"I'm sorry."

"*J'vous en prie.*"

For a moment we stood silently, frankly watching Lucy and Nordale. It was very puzzling.

"Are American girls generally like her?" Victor asked.

"American girls aren't generally like anything. You mustn't ask me questions that way." o

"Oh, now you're trying to show me you *do* have a sharp tongue."

"Not at all."

"What I meant is she's rather lovely, isn't she? I didn't like her a bit last night—until she started dancing."

"That was obvious," I said.

"She hadn't any character until then."

It surprised me that Victor spoke of Lucy in terms of character. In my own thoughts that word had never occurred to me.

"She wants being made love to," he added in a clinical way.

"Do you think that's singular?" I laughed.

"You know, dear boy—in her it somehow is."

The smashing dinner Victor had promised didn't altogether succeed. It was congenial and Victor played the part expected of him. But for me, at any rate, it lacked the element of fun.

Lucy had been impressed by Mme Brunot's gathering. As a matter of fact, when Victor and I suggested leaving, there was almost reluctance in her acquiescence.

I was introduced to Nordale while Lucy made ready to go. He reverted to French with me, and we didn't find a great deal to say to each other. He told us that Lucy had accepted an invitation to his studio for the following afternoon and said that he would be delighted if we came with her.

I, unfortunately, was returning to London next day; Victor was afraid he had to do the same.

I don't think Nordale minded.

At dinner Lucy said:

"All we talked about was Washington. He was there in 1939 and he wanted to know what it was like now. What he remembered best was the Zoo and the reflecting pool.

It was a silly conversation really but it was better than talking about art. He wants me to go to his studio to-morrow. It was darling the way he told me his mother would be there."

I suppose one of the reasons we had less fun that Sunday night was the feeling I had—and maybe Victor shared it, too—that Lucy was launched. She wouldn't really need us any more.

There was no actual foundation for this impression. She said she hated our leaving the next day. "I hope your plane crashes," she said pouting.

"I'm going by ship," said Victor.

Then she hoped it would sink. We were being so mean. How would she manage now that we had gotten her used to depending on us?

It didn't seem to me that was anything we needed to worry about too seriously.

That night each of us had a farewell kiss.

At least I was one up on Victor.

{ Three }

ALTHOUGH I returned to London on Monday as planned, I didn't get around to telephoning Marianne until about a week later. Affairs at the Embassy—usually routine and mechanical—had suddenly taken a chaotic turn. I had to work evenings and help to straighten out a number of snarled situations. It happened to all of us about once every two months : it was all in a day's work. But it wasn't a time when I would have cared much for purely social activity. And London isn't the sort of place where you can suggest a drink in a café ; arrangements have to be so much more formal. It's either starched collars and bowlers or not very much of anything.

As always, the Embassy routines re-established themselves after a few days ; the reports got written and dispatched ; a lot of cables kept things moving between various parts of the world ; the personnel complications were ultimately solved like a chess problem. And then the typewriters, as one walked down the corridors, sounded calmer again.

Finally I called Marianne and explained that it had been one hell of a week.

She said : " I was wondering about you. Weren't you supposed to be back last Monday ? "

" Yes," I said, " I got back then but all this work piled up and I haven't done a thing."

" It has been rather dull, hasn't it? And this filthy weather."

It had been grim, I agreed, much more like November than the beginning of June.

She said : " Instead of going to Greece or Africa or anywhere warm as we all should do would you like to come round to dinner ? "

" Yes, very much. When ? "

" Well what about to-night ? It'll be quiet I warn you."

" That's fine with me."

The prospect of dinner with the Croydens always evoked mixed feelings in me. The main reason for this was that I never felt particularly welcome there ; I was simply tolerated as a " find " of Marianne's. I was perfectly certain that the Croydens had no interest whatsoever in me in my own right, though I might have seemed amusing the first time we all met. Feeling this, I was consequently never the slightest bit bright there, made only the stodgiest kind of conversation, and felt an utter lack of rapport.

Marianne's father ought to have been the sort of person one should like to know in a foreign country. Only it wasn't that simple. Some well-known people wear their fame lightly, or at least comfortably. On Robert Croyden it was a heavy load—though the very weight of it was an element of his happiness. Surely one of the few really successful playwrights of this century, he was still—after twenty years—enjoying his success when I knew him. I don't mean by that that his plays were still making money, though that was true enough. No, I mean that his behaviour always suggested to me that he had not yet gotten over the phase, which all such people must go through, of revelling in his fame. From my point of view, he had no real sense of modesty.

One minor difficulty I had in visiting his house was that I had never genuinely enjoyed any of his plays that I had seen. Though they were invariably mounted with elegance and taste, I found them pretentious, didactic, over-intellectual

and totally lacking in warmth or humour. They were simply *dry*. It always comforted me to remember that most of my countrymen, at least, agreed with me : Croyden had never had a success in the States. He was sharply resentful of that.

In his way, I suppose, he was a specialized British phenomenon—like pantomime and music hall and a certain kind of farce that Americans rarely appreciate. His level, of course, was miles higher ; in fact, he operated in a personal stratosphere as compared with most of his competitors. His great draw must have been snob appeal : it couldn't have been anything else. No one could convince me that his adoring audiences grasped his message. Yet year after year there was a Croyden success on Shaftesbury Avenue. His plays were rarely referred to by name, merely as "the new Croyden." And all the important stage personalities had had a crack at Croyden just as they did at Shakespeare and Ibsen.

He loved all this. Understandably.

But I found him amazingly old-fashioned personally. His money and tastes led him to require a kind of luxurious life that was almost impossible in England after the war. He complained all the time when I first became acquainted with him about the strictures of British life : the austerity, the lack of food, the Government, the taxes. None of his clubs suited him any longer. Servants were presumptuous. Restaurants were dishonest. The lower classes did nothing but gamble.

All that one could hope, he said, was that the aristocracy would remain intact and survive these new Dark Ages. But it appeared that they, too, would wither away for lack of sustenance. All the great estates were already going, going . . .

I remember at least one such tirade during a dinner there. Even Marianne was embarrassed. He was, of course, an arch-Conservative. Believed that a bit of unemployment was a good thing, was violently against rationing, Trade

Unions, restrictions of any kind. He often made it sound as if his whole idea of the Good Life consisted of country estates, titles and hunt balls. Considering the way the wind was blowing in England just after the war, he was like a man trying to go up a 'down' escalator.

And yet he did have charm—quantities of it. He was a very attractive man of fifty, with straight blond hair turning white. His conversation was far wittier than his writing, though he could also be starchy and ultra-conventional when he chose. With women he was extremely graceful and attentive. I think, in fact, that he was generally more comfortable with women than with men.

Under all these circumstances, his wife was hardly able to exert much force of personality. Yet Mrs. Croyden—though always a pale greyish figure—held her own very successfully. She was, of course, much simpler than he was: expected less, was satisfied with more. In a way, she, too, was a little outmoded. She always reminded me of a Sargent portrait—elongated, purposeful, intelligent, and yet somewhat wan. All that was required of her was that she should be a hostess. For the usual things that wives attend to, the household boasted a raft of servants. Croyden would never have done without them.

I sometimes wondered whether Mrs. Croyden was not bored. She appeared to be perfectly calm, she spoke of being busy—sometimes even rushed. But I never could imagine what she did to fill her days. During the summer they usually went to a villa they owned in Rapallo: the plays were written there. In the winter there was entertaining and theatre—and that seemed to be about all for her. Of course, formal social activity can be time-consuming; maybe that's what she meant when she used to say she'd been rushed. Fittings at the dressmaker, sessions with the hairdresser, approving menus, invitations: that kind of thing. I'm only conjecturing, for I never really understood.

In some ways their house on Old Church Street was fixed

up to resemble a club rather than a home. That night, after depositing my wet hat and raincoat into somebody's arms, I was shown into a room with leather chairs, books, magazines and newspapers ; very much like a club 'silence room'. Except that Marianne was there waiting for me, and she cried out upon seeing me :

" Oh, I *am* glad you could come ! It's a beastly night, isn't it ? "

" Cats and dogs. "

" Do come to the fire and have a drink. What'll you have—gin and French ? "

Marianne mixed the drink for me while I stood in front of the fire. This kind of living did have its points, I told myself. As long as one went without central heating, I was all for roaring fireplaces—even in June.

" We're all coming down with colds, " said Marianne. " Mummy's actually been in bed and Daddy's been sneezing all day—and now I've got a throat. "

" I should have stayed home, " I said.

" Oh, we'll keep our distance. "

We sat facing each other, relaxed by the fire. Marianne had apparently been reading ; a book and glasses lay on the table beside her. These surroundings were favourable to her ; they fitted her and gave her the primary advantage of compatibility. She might be all wrong in Paris : here she was just right.

Seeing Marianne here made me wonder how Lucy would appear in this room. And just then Marianne said : " Tell me about Lucy. You did see her again after I left, didn't you ? "

" Oh, yes. Victor and I spent that Sunday with her. "

" Victor ? Isn't that odd—I haven't heard a word from him. "

" He was in very good form that day, " I said. " We went to Versailles and then visited some woman, Lucy had met on the boat. It really turned out to be a pleasant day. "

"Good." She didn't sound as if she regretted missing it. The Denby-Frasers had probably furnished some entertainment much more in her style. "By the way—talking about Americans there's one here to-night. Isobel March."

Without forethought I said, "Not that little actress who——"

"Yes. Tell me about her."

"What do you mean? I don't know her."

"Haven't you seen her?"

"Oh, yes," I said. "When I was home last year I saw that show she had her success in."

"Was she good?"

I waited a second before answering. "As I remember I didn't think she was especially. But you know the way I never like anything."

"Oh, I don't mean the play—I just mean her performance."

"That's what I was talking about. The play itself wasn't at all bad. French, wasn't it? Anouilh or Giraudoux, I don't remember any more. But I know the critics all loved her."

"But you didn't?"

I sipped at the gin and then said: "I think you're just trying to embarrass me."

"No, I'm not. Really I'm not. It's just that she's probably going to be in Daddy's new play and I wanted to know what you thought of her."

"In that case I won't say another word about it. You know I don't have a clue when it comes to the theatre."

Marianne smiled. "You always have views, I've noticed."

After a minute she said, "You know—she looks rather like Lucy."

"Who does?"

"Isobel March."

"Oh, no!" I said. "Not a bit as I remember. You just think all American girls look alike. Anyway she's older."

"I'm not sure she is, you know."

I tried seriously to recall the performance I had seen. Because of all the praise and publicity, I might well have gone to the play with prejudices. But the girl had been graceful, that much I admitted ; she had probably trained as a dancer. Was it the voice I hadn't liked ? Certainly there had been a lack of technique, of stage presence. It seemed to me the whole performance had been an exploitation of charm ; and charm never seems to me enough on the stage, unless it's used.

"I thought you said it would be a quiet evening," I said.

"You see, I didn't know she'd be here when I talked to you. Daddy didn't say anything until six. . . . It wouldn't surprise me if he's smitten." She laughed good-naturedly, giving me the privilege of not taking her seriously.

At dinner we looked between and around candles at one another. Isobel March sat directly opposite me. I realized that it would have been difficult to argue that she was not an attractive girl. She did have a look that can only be called theatrical—I suppose it's a special way of using make-up. If so, it can't be a closely guarded secret, because quite often shopgirls and waitresses and usherettes have it. But Isobel March was helped out of the ordinary by extremely expressive eyes : dark, wide and somehow mournful. I felt that they would prevent her from ever playing pure comedy, because they would always, in spite of herself, provide an under-current of despair and suffering.

Her attention was naturally centred on Croyden, who sat perfectly upright in his chair. It would have been sinful for anyone to slouch at that table. All one had to do was look at Croyden : one straightened immediately.

"Don't you run into people at your Embassy who want to let their flats ?" Croyden was asking me. "Miss March will need a decent place to live."

"Yes, sometimes I do," I said. "I'll keep my ears open anyway."

"Not *too* expensive, please," Isobel March said, smiling at me. "But a real London flat—you know what I mean."

No, I didn't quite know what she meant. The flats that came to my attention were authentic enough, but I didn't feel they were what she had in mind. As far as I could judge, all she had to go by were Greer Garson movies and MGM décor.

Croyden set down his fork and said: "I was just remembering that when I first came to London a long long time ago the first flat I had was in Jermyn Street. All my friends thought I was wildly extravagant because it cost thirty shillings a week—with service, of course. They were all paying something like twenty-five. I had everything that you could want including a woman who brought me meals. Thirty shillings, imagine it!"

In the silence which followed, each of us, I suppose, thought about money in one way or another: how much or how little. How much things changed, or how they remained the same.

Isobel March broke the silence by saying to me: "It must be so interesting working at the Embassy."

I laughed. It was a stock remark that everyone made sooner or later. "Actually, it's terribly dull," I said, and realized I almost always answered that way. Tit for tat.

"It's useful," said Marianne.

"How do you mean?" Miss March asked. She was rather careful in what she said. She had the air of realizing that she was in very special company and that it might be wrong to relax.

"Oh, I was just thinking about the way people are always trying to get cigarettes and whisky out of Americans who work here."

"Do you get American cigarettes?" Miss March said. "How nice! I must get to know you better."

"Do please have some more asparagus, Miss March," said Mrs. Croyden, a serene portrait at her end of the table.

"I wish you'd all call me Isobel. I hope——" she glanced smilingly at Croyden, "I hope I'm going to be here a *long* time so that we shall be great friends."

"I hope so, too," said Croyden, raising his wine-glass to her. "I hope you're here so long, my dear, that you get sick to death of the play and beg for a vacation."

"Oh, I could never get sick of the play!" she protested. "It's so wonderful. Have you read it?" she asked me, presuming that I was closer to Croyden than I really was.

I had to admit that I had not.

"Well, you've got an experience waiting for you. You know—when the script came I got so excited about it I just read and read and smoked two packs of cigarettes and missed a dinner date and everything. I called my agent and said, 'You've got to sew it up right away.' Now I can't wait to start rehearsals. . . ."

Croyden was pleased, but Marianne looked at me sceptically. I think I managed to keep my face a blank; in fact, I was puzzled by what sounded to me like obvious insincerity.

The girl went on. "You know, it's considered a tremendous opportunity to play in London. Just think of Tallulah Bankhead and—well, all the American actors who got their big start here. The London theatre is—well——"

She didn't really know what the London theatre was, but that didn't stop her.

Mrs. Croyden said, as if from a distance: "Our theatres are so much smaller."

"Oh, that makes it intimate." Isobel used hand gestures to make something more of this trite statement than it was on its own. Fortunately her hands were good and she used them to advantage—suggesting that intimacy was a pleasure, a necessity in the theatre.

"What interests me," she continued, gradually becoming more voluble, "is when I look in the paper and read down the list of plays that are on right now—well, it's amazing. I counted thirty-four yesterday. I don't think there's ever that

many on in New York. And, of course, now everything's closing for the summer there and here it's just starting again.

"Really the theatre's practically dead in New York," she announced finally.

Marianne said : "What about all these gigantic musicals we keep getting directly from New York?"

"Oh, *musicals* ! They're a dime a dozen, of course."

Mrs. Croyden surprised me by saying : "I rather like them. So gay and colourful."

"A strange addiction of yours, my dear," said her husband, smiling down the length of the table and nodding to her. It was exactly little statements like these that embarrassed me in Croyden. That sort of thing is taken off so beautifully in farce.

The conversation went on pretty much at that level. Isobel March didn't seem to be able to talk anything but theatre. I learned that the play was to open in October, that rehearsals started in early July and that the interim would be spent on tour. She did so look forward to seeing all those *other* cities and getting to know what English people of all types were like.

I don't suppose she had any way of knowing how dreary a tour of the provinces could really be. Of course, I only judged from what I'd been told—but on that basis I certainly wouldn't have been eager about starting out for Glasgow and Manchester and Newcastle—or wherever it was the company would go.

Mrs. Croyden drew me aside during coffee to talk about Lucy.

"I'm afraid it was terribly rude of Marianne to rush away from Paris as she did," Mrs. Croyden said.

"I don't think so. She really hadn't any responsibility for Lucy."

"But you know, in a way, I feel we have *some* responsibility. You see Lucy's family were extremely kind to Marianne and me when we visited them. We weren't allowed to take any

money, you know, and they were, oh, very generous. And Mrs. Forlane wrote to say Lucy was coming to Paris and hoped we would see her. Naturally I invited her to come here, but Lucy preferred to go to Paris. And I can quite understand."

"I do think she'll have a good time there," I said. "How did you know the Forlanes?"

"That's a very odd thing. Lucy's father, George is his name—an awfully interesting man. Frightfully successful in business I believe and yet a bit—what shall I say?—unhappy about it. So many Americans seem to be divided that way—don't you agree?"

"But in any case he happened to see one of Robert's plays in New York. Actually it was one that didn't go frightfully well in the States—but George says it was the most tremendous experience of his life. There was a businessman in it you see and he, too, was a divided man. Frankly I don't know how Robert wrote about such a character. . . ." She looked admiringly towards her husband as if she had just realized afresh how brilliant he was.

"What I mean to say is that George wrote a fan letter of all things. He says he's never done that before in his life. Strange, isn't it? But stranger still, Robert actually read the letter and was deeply moved and answered it himself. Usually his secretary takes care of all that but this time he did it himself.

"You realize that was before the war. But since then they've written constantly to one another and when Robert wrote that Marianne and I were going to the States, George Forlane insisted that we stay in his house in Virginia."

Marianne, approaching us, heard the last sentence and said: "Are you telling the Forlane saga? It's quite a story, isn't it?"

"Yes," I said. "Why haven't you ever told me?"

"I don't know—it never came up. But you know Daddy has never met the Forlanes—any of them."

"Yes," said Mrs. Croyden. "We invite them every year and somehow they never manage to come. I think they prefer to go to Maine during the summer."

"And, of course, Daddy's never been in the States," Marianne said.

"Maybe they never *should* meet," I suggested.

"I'm not sure about that," said Marianne. "I rather think they'd hit it off splendidly. Mr. Forlane isn't a typical businessman at all."

"Yes, your mother was just saying that."

"That's why I think Daddy might be fascinated by him."

Mrs. Croyden said: "And Marianne tells me that Lucy is quite an adult now. She was only a child when we saw her. A very pretty child."

"Yes," I said, "she's certainly grown up now. And still very pretty."

It was about eleven when I decided to go. Isobel March thought she ought to leave, too. It was immediately apparent that I should have to see her home.

As soon as we were seated in my car, Isobel said to me: "Listen—are you a great friend of theirs?"

Puzzled, I said, "Not really. I know Marianne fairly well but I hardly ever see her parents."

"Good! Now give me one of your American cigarettes and let me blow off steam."

She drew on her cigarette deeply and showed her pleasure. I said, "What do you mean?"

"Honey, I don't know what this little chick's let herself in for. Is it always like that? There I was keeping my mouth flapping—yak, yak—just to help some conversation along. . . ."

"Oh, is that what you mean?" I laughed.

"Yes—and there *you* were sitting like a bump on a log. You could have helped me out if you'd tried."

"Well, that's the way it usually is. But I thought you were being a big success."

"Success?" she said. "All I did was to keep putting my big paw in my mouth. Honey, I was absolutely *dead* after a half-hour. Whatever have I let myself in for? You know—the play, just take the play. I don't know what the hell it's about. Everybody in New York says Croyden, Croyden—chance of a lifetime. So I listen.

"Sure, I was the toast of the town for six months last year. Did you see my cover-story in *Life*? Okay, but that doesn't mean there's another part just sitting there waiting for you. That's the whole trouble. I've read scripts—honey, let me tell you I read fifty-two scripts. *This* you should try some time. . . . How am I supposed to know whether a script is right or not? Everybody tells you something different and nobody knows a damned thing. I tell you I've been going cur-razy!

"And then comes this. The idea sounded fine and it was a wonderful chance to get out of New York for the summer. But now I'm not sure."

"Why?" I asked.

"You know—I think it was seeing him that did it. Croyden, I mean. That house, that whole set-up. What are they playing in that house?—Pinero? I don't care what anybody says—I know now that play stinks."

I couldn't contain my laughter, but I hoped it sounded sympathetic. She was certainly more enjoyable company without her company manners. I didn't feel so certain that she couldn't play comedy after all.

"Well, I've got to go through with it. Luckily I'm a fast study so rehearsals won't matter much—but how am I going to find out what the hell it's about?"

"Can't help you there."

"And another thing, honey—if this is London you can keep it. I know it gets hot in New York and all but believe me it's better than *this*. Do you come from New York?"

"I know New York," I said.

"Well, you know the difference then. I have the cutest little apartment in the Village. You'll have to see it some day."

"Oh, you'll probably be in Sutton Place when I get home."

"Think so?"

She was staying at the Mount Royal, which, of course, was something quite different from the Village or Sutton Place. She invited me up for a drink. Her room was in a state of utter disarray. Suitcases open on the floor, clothes scattered over every available surface. It seemed likely that she made any room she lived in look like this.

And in the midst of it all, she had two huge framed publicity pictures of herself on the bureau: one sophisticated, one naïve. The gamut.

With a drink in my hand, I said: "You realize all his plays are successes over here."

"That's what they tell me." She pulled off her shoes and sat on the bed.

"Although I seem to remember there was some commotion in the gallery at his last opening."

"God—that's the kind of thing that scares me. It's really so different here, you know. The audiences are different and the actors are different. I've only been here two weeks but I've been going to the shows—and I've been getting scared."

"Oh, I wouldn't worry," I said. "Once you start rehearsing and get to know the company. . . ."

"Maybe. But let me tell you, honey, I don't like Croyden. He gives me the willies."

"Most people find him terribly attractive," I said.

"Sure—he's attractive enough. But I have a funny feeling he'd never try to make a pass at me—that's what gives me the willies. Now *you*—oh, hell, you're an American. I could understand you the minute I saw you. *You'll* make a pass at me sooner or later. . . ."

She smiled at me very winningly. I think she must have suddenly become very pleased with herself.

"Probably," I said. "Except that if I did you'd be on my neck, the way Marianne said. You'd want cigarettes and whisky and all those little things I'm not supposed to give you."

"Of course I would. Why not?"

I shrugged my shoulders and laughed again. It would have been very hard not to like her at that moment.

She seemed, however, quite capable of getting out of hand.

I said: "You're a good liar, aren't you?"

"What do you mean?" she asked without resentment.

"Talking about the play to-night—how you loved it and couldn't wait to start rehearsals and all that."

"Well, I had to say *some* thing! I might as well make the best of it now that I'm stuck."

I decided to provoke her if I could. "But I don't think you did it very well. I wasn't convinced and I kind of think Marianne had her doubts."

"She's a sharp one, isn't she?"

I couldn't really say whether I thought that exactly described Marianne. She certainly was nobody's fool, if that's what 'sharp' implied.

Isobel laughed. "I'll give a better performance for you some time."

"I've already seen you give a better performance."

"When?" she asked eagerly.

"I saw your play in New York last year."

"You did? Isn't that nice? Yes, you're a real sweet thing. I'll have to give you a nickname."

"Why?"

"I just *do*," she said. "I'll have to think about it. By the way, everybody calls me Winky."

"That sounds terrible!"

"Better than Izzy."

When I got up to go she asked me to leave her my pack of Camels. I did, without minding. I liked her remembering that point.

{ Four }

IT was several weeks later when Lucy telephoned me. By pure luck it was an evening when Winky and I had decided to eat at my flat. Mrs. Twigg had shopped for essentials and Winky had gone a bit wild getting extras at Fortnum and Mason's. Mrs. Twigg, who considered herself indispensable to me, didn't for a moment care to have Winky making free of her kitchen, but she was so well-bred, had served such excellent families, that she said nothing. Her only failing was that she let it all show on her face.

We were just having a second pre-dinner drink when the phone rang. Since the operator announced first that Rome was calling, Lucy's voice, distorted, pinched and remote, came as a complete surprise.

"What are you doing in Rome?" I asked.

For a couple of seconds I heard only scraping noises. Then two operators (female) shouted at one another.

"I didn't hear you," Lucy said.

"I asked what you're doing in Rome."

"Oh—didn't you get my letter?"

"No, I haven't heard from you at all."

"Oh, dear."

Again there was an interruption of several seconds. All I heard was something like a magnified sound of insects.

Then Lucy's voice: "It's a long story but I'm stuck here at the Excelsior Hotel and I'm not going to have enough money.

I wondered if you knew anybody at the Embassy here who could help me out."

I was completely bewildered. Winky, who could see the expression on my face, asked what was wrong.

I gestured to her that it was all right, and asked Lucy whether she was in any kind of trouble.

"Not exactly," she said. "You sure you didn't get my letter?"

"Honestly, I haven't had anything from you, Lucy. When did you mail it?"

"Yesterday," she said weakly.

"Oh, well, it'll probably come to-morrow."

"I guess so."

Somehow a French operator got on to the line. She sounded like a very unpleasant woman.

When she'd gone, I said: "Well, look, Lucy, I do have a friend at the Embassy. I'll give you his address and you see if you can get hold of him."

I had to ruffle through my address book for the page that was devoted to Harrison Beck. For some reason he moved frequently but always sent announcements of his new addresses.

"He'll help you if he's there," I said. "But if you can't get him call me right back."

"Okay. Will do." She sounded more cheerful just then.

"Are you staying at the Excelsior?" I asked.

"I guess so."

"Are you all right?"

"Oh, sure, I'm fine. It's just that I had a trick played on me."

"A trick?" I said, all at sea.

"I can't explain over the *phone*. Maybe you'll get my letter to-morrow. Well, anyway, thanks a lot, I'll try to get hold of your friend right away."

"And Lucy, please let me know if you don't reach him. I could wire you money or whatever you need."

"Well, I'll try him. So long and thanks again."

When I had hung up, Winky said: "Who's that?"

"Lucy Forlane. She's a friend of Marianne's."

"Of Marianne's? Well, why's she calling you?"

It was a good question. I hadn't stopped to wonder myself. All I knew was that Lucy had sounded peculiarly embarrassed.

"English?" Winky asked.

"No—American. I met her in Paris last month."

"Oh."

Winky seemed rather disappointed by it all. I must have appeared a bit preoccupied when I came back from the phone. Actually I was wondering whether I should telephone Harry myself, then decided it wasn't necessary, then wondered whether he would be nice to her. Harrison could be pompous sometimes. He was a fat boy, but not a jolly one.

"Well—are you with me, honey?" Winky said smiling.

"I'm sorry. I was just thinking."

"About Lucy?"

"Yes—of course."

"Is she important?"

I was rather surprised by the question and said as much. As a matter of fact, I was wrong to react just that way, because the question could have been merely friendly, sympathetic, and nothing more.

But Winky stopped me from backing out by saying: "Yes, it is kind of funny because you know I had a little pang."

"Why?"

"Mmm—because you seemed so upset about this girl and all."

I felt, helplessly, that there was a discussion approaching: an attempt to set ourselves straight, to talk frankly, to clarify. Our relationship had grown quickly and casually in such a way that we had never felt the need. We were not pretending that we felt anything very strong or special for one another, anything that needed explaining. We had not, God knows, been driven together by passion or overwhelming

emotions of any kind. If anything, it was laziness—inertia—that had kept us seeing one another.

Winky rather made fun of me, as a rule. Once she had said : “ You know, honey, for somebody who’s not what you would call good-looking you have a surprisingly nice body.” She tended generally to play me down that way, and it was a manner that I found perfectly acceptable. It was clean-cut, sensible, fun. I had a feeling, anyway, that once she really started to work and met a variety of people in her own profession she’d have much less time for me.

So there was between us an admirable and extremely comfortable freedom. Now, if we had to talk about it and make it a matter of concern, or contention, or agreement—I felt that this freedom could never be quite the same. It could be talked out of existence.

I knew, very simply, that I wanted to shy away from this conversation, and so I did something completely out of proportion. With absolute impulsiveness, I said : “ You know, I think I might like to go to Rome and see what’s happened to her.”

Winky, who was generally devoid of histrionics in her off-stage life, jumped up from her chair and walked across the room, just as they do in ‘ civilized ’ drama.

Even though I was surprised at myself, I went on : “ I’ve got plenty of leave coming to me and I could fly down for a couple of days. . . .”

“ It sounds wonderful,” she said in a neutral voice. “ Why don’t you ?”

And then I felt a little sorry for her. I don’t know why. I said, “ Why don’t you live here while I’m gone ?”

“ Oh, honey, *could* I ? It would be heavenly to be out of a hotel room and I could read all your books and curl up and——”

“ Only keep it neat. Mrs. Twigg will be very put out——”

“ Oh, I will ! And don’t you worry about her, we’re getting around to being pretty good friends. We’ll be pals

before you know it. I let her taste a strawberry to-day when I came in with all the stuff I'd bought. She thinks it was a mad extravagance. . . . But really, honey, you're a doll and I'll be the neatest little mistress you ever had ! ”

We had a particularly happy and satisfying evening. The dinner was good. We got a little high. And I rather enjoyed the delusion that I had handled the situation adroitly.

The letter, fortunately, did arrive the next morning. In the light of Lucy's call the night before, it struck me as very funny.

“ I met the nicest Frenchman last week. He works in a travel agency and when I said something about thinking of going to Italy, he said he could arrange the whole trip for me. I felt a little sorry for him, because he is a dear sweet person and he's been very nice to me, and doesn't seem to have much money. I hadn't meant that I wanted to go to Italy right now, but when I thought about it I couldn't see any reason why I shouldn't. So I told him to go ahead and he did.

“ It all sounds very exciting. I'm going to Rome first, staying at the Excelsior Hotel. I'll probably be there ten days. Then to the Isle of Capri where I'll stay at the Quisisana. (That looks peculiar but that's what it says here on the sheet I'm copying from.) Then on June 30th I come back to Rome for a couple of days. On July 2nd to Florence, at the Majestic, for a week.

“ Oh, well, I won't give you the whole itinerary. I'll write to you from somewhere along the way—I love hotel stationery. I wrote this just so that you would know what had happened to me in case you came to Paris while I'm away.

“ The whole trip turned out to be surprisingly cheap, only 65,000 francs and René tells me I shall be in all the best hotels. Imagine how much a month's trip like this would cost at home. It really is true that Europe is cheaper. . . . ”

I had to wake Winky and read the letter to her.

"She sounds a bit naïve," she said afterwards.

"Honestly I'm surprised about it. I didn't think she would fall for that kind of trickery. I suppose she paid him for the whole thing and now she finds they never heard of her at the Excelsior."

"Oh, God ! How much does it amount to ?"

"About two hundred dollars."

"Two *hundred!*" said she, dropping her teeth. "Can she afford it ?"

"Oh, yes," I said. "The family's rolling in money, I believe. But just think how embarrassed she must feel."

"Embarrassed *hell!*—I'd be raving mad !"

Rome wasn't a bit warmer than London. All the way down in the plane I'd been thinking about the sun, the South, heat and languor. But it was cold : I was glad of my coat.

It was disappointing not to find Lucy at the hotel, but there was no reason to think she'd be there at four in the afternoon. I checked in anyway and called Harrison from my room.

Though he was only sitting a couple of blocks down the street he sounded far away. "And what are *you* doing here?" he asked first of all.

"Just came down on a lark."

"Still the same old joker, I see. How are tricks ?"

"Fine," I said. "Everything's fine. But tell me, Harry, did Lucy Forlane get in touch with you ?"

"Oh, yes, she did indeed. Tracked me down at a dinner party last night. Is she an old friend of yours ?"

"Not exactly," I admitted.

"I thought she seemed a little *young* for you."

I let that pass. "Is it all straightened out ?" I asked.

"It's just the usual thing. Lost her travellers' cheques and got into a panic. I notified American Express—but I don't suppose it'll do much good. She didn't have the numbers, of course ; anything to make things easy ! I've let her have some money and we cabled the family"

"Was she really upset?"

Harrison laughed—a fat man's laugh. "For about a minute, I guess. They bounce back soon enough. We had a drink last night and she was quite cheerful. Too much energy for me."

"You're getting old, Harry," I said, "getting old."

"Yes, and damn happy about it, too."

I might have known that Lucy would not be alone when I found her. She was sitting inside Doney's, eating a *gelato* with a young man who was unmistakably an American. I saw them through the window; she looked animated and happy.

Since I had wired her that morning she was not taken completely by surprise. She caught sight of me as I came through the door. With a shriek of recognition she jumped up and ran towards me. I got a smacking kiss on my cheek.

"I feel just *dreadful* about this!" she cried. "Making all this fuss and then you flying down here. It wasn't necessary at all, I declare it wasn't. Everything's all right now."

"Oh, I just felt like coming," I said.

When we sat down at the table she indicated the young man with her hand: "This is Avery Munce."

He was about twenty-six, I judged; small and neat, wearing a Brooks Brothers pink shirt.

He shook my hand vigorously, as small people often do.

"Say, I think I know you," he said. "Aren't you a friend of Gordon Tucker?"

"No."

"Hugh Rosenbaum?"

"No."

"Beverly de Pinna? I'm sure I've heard your name before. You live in St. Tropez, don't you?"

"No, as a matter of fact, I live in London."

"Avery knows absolutely everybody!" Lucy said. "He works for Orson Welles."

Avery was thinking something out; at least he had furrowed his brow. Finally he said, "You're the guy that was engaged to Rosalie Guest's sister-in-law. Sure—I met you in Brussels at Philippe de Bernival's house."

"I'm sorry," I said. "I really don't know any of these people."

"Never mind," said Lucy, "it doesn't really matter to me a bit. I don't know anybody, either. Avery keeps saying all these names and I only knew one—some painter that a girl I know used to pose for, only I never met him actually in person."

Her radiance bore no relation to the voice I'd heard over the long-distance telephone. She was completely recovered. It was almost rude to bring up the subject of my visit.

"I spoke to Harry Beck," I said. "I gather everything's cleared up."

"It seems that way. Only my poor, dear mother—she'll have an absolute fit! It was five hundred dollars!"

"The travellers' cheques?"

"Yes. Isn't it ghastly?"

Avery said, "I knew a guy, last year he lost two hundred dollars, greenbacks, I mean. Just dropped them somewhere or other when he was pie-eyed."

"I didn't drop *mine*!" said Lucy.

"—Some people haven't got the sense they were born with," Avery continued.

"—I know just who took them, too. Only how will I ever prove it?"

"How will you ever find the guy, you mean," said Avery, who seemed to be very wise in the ways of the world.

"Is that the René you wrote about?" I asked.

"Oh, you *got* my letter! Yes, his name is René Saulieu, it's spelled S-A-U-L-I-E-U and it's very hard for me to pronounce, but it's so French."

"Ha!" said Avery.

"What do you mean, ha?"

"You think that's his *real* name? God Almighty, that's the oldest con game in the books."

I was wishing that I could be alone with Lucy. It seemed to me Avery Munce would only depress her, but all she did was laugh whenever he spoke, as if she found him killingly funny.

"I know I was a fool," she said, "but what difference does it make? Only it was a shock, let me tell you, when I came prancing up to the desk at the hotel here and they never heard of me. It took quite a while before the dawn broke on me. No reservations—no tickets—"

"No nothing," Avery supplied. He explained to me: That's the best part of it. This guy says to her that all her tickets will be waiting at the Excelsior, through his Rome office. Can you imagine it? It makes me sick that anybody could be such a—well, so *trusting*!"

I was suddenly very depressed myself. The whole idea of flying all the way to Rome to help Lucy seemed to me incredibly foolish. All that she had needed from me was a telephone number—Harrison's—and now that whatever trivial mess she'd gotten into was taken care of, I was entirely superfluous to her life. Avery Munce was clearly more amusing to her. There were others like him or unlike him—multitudes of them, every nationality and breed—who were lined up to amuse her or serve her or even rob her. It didn't seem to matter: she was somehow inviolate.

I not only felt like a tremendous fool, I knew I'd been one.

Fortunately, Avery jumped up a few minutes later. "Conference at five," he said. "Gotta run. Where'll you be later?"

"Gosh, I don't know," said Lucy. "It all depends."

"Oh, well, I'll look around for you. Everybody goes to the same places. Be seeing you."

He marched away with brisk confidence and then waved to us from the pavement.

I asked Lucy who the little man was and she answered,

"I don't know. He says he works for Orson Welles. I just met him this afternoon."

Inexplicably I was annoyed with her. "Do you tell your story to everybody you meet?"

"But it's kind of funny, isn't it?"

"Depending on how you care to look at it. What makes you think he's any more honest than your René?"

Lucy looked utterly surprised. "But he's an *American*!"

I stared at her, asking myself whether she was really so innocent. It had once occurred to me she might be stupid. Yet I realized that she had something which so many of us lose: a sense of trust. I could not help thinking of Winky, She, quite clearly, had lost her sense of trust. She would not, in the first place, have been taken in by this con game, as Avery Munce had properly called it. But, if by any chance she had, she certainly would not have been sitting, as Lucy was now, in a state of calm amusement about it.

But wasn't Lucy better off? Since there was very little, if anything, that she could do about the situation now, wasn't it easier and happier and decidedly less wearing for her to accept it as a simple fact of life? It was as if she realized that some of the jokes in life have to be on oneself: the butt cannot always be 'other people'.

"You look kind of cross," she said to me.

"No, I'm really not. I'm just trying to figure you out, if you really want to know."

"Oh, no!"

"I've decided you're all right, Lucy. I'm not going to lecture you or give you advice. I'm not going to tell you you have to be careful——"

"Why don't you?" she said. "It would be nice from you." But she wasn't serious.

"Yes, I'm sure it would. But what are your plans now?"

"I wish I knew."

"You can get real tickets and reservations and do the same tour, can't you?"

She shook her head. "No, I don't think I want to now. I think I'd rather go back to Paris."

I had no comment on that. She would do what she wanted, anyway, and it was no business of mine to persuade her in any direction.

"You know—the worst thing," she said, "the worst thing is that he simply *stole* those damned travellers' cheques. In a way I don't mind about the rest; he just fooled me and that's that. But, you see, he was terribly sweet, he insisted on taking me to the train and he looked after my suitcases and things. And somehow he got hold of my purse and just snatched the cheques right under my eyes."

"Oh, Lucy," I laughed, "it really is infuriating."

"Oh, well." She shrugged her shoulders and, as usual, she was smiling. "I can't blame him. It's all my own fault."

I finally decided to order a drink. Gradually I relaxed and let myself realize that I was in Rome. I could see the *carrozze* moving along the Via Veneto; I saw the beggars, the children, the Americans. Around us, well-groomed Italians with their fabulous air of leisure were discussing things that seemed important to them. I wondered aimlessly what kind of people they were, where they lived, what kind of jobs they had. The impression they gave was that they did nothing; that they had been born and educated to this—sitting in cafés and talking. . . .

I was not sorry I'd come, after all. It didn't matter if I had done a foolish thing. It didn't matter if I was unnecessary to Lucy. This was Rome, above all, and how could I be downcast.

"You really don't understand the whole thing yet," Lucy said after a while. "You don't know why I decided to come here in the first place."

"No, of course I don't, except you said something about not seeing any reason why you shouldn't."

"Maybe I'll tell you about it later."

I sighed. "You don't have to try to be tantalizing, you

know. Just tell me if you want to and *when* you want to. But please, Lucy, don't make half-promises. It seems to me you once did something like that before."

"Oh, you *are* cross," she said, laughing. "You actually snarled, just like a tiger."

"I didn't."

After a silence, during which I felt a little ashamed of myself, she said, "I'm sorry. It's just that I feel so silly about the whole thing."

I didn't reply to that; instead I talked about dinner, the possibility of a walk before that, perhaps a drink somewhere else.

She was agreeable to everything. We stopped first at the hotel and I found a message from Harrison asking what I was doing for dinner. At length, after consultation and telephoning, we arranged to have dinner together—the three of us.

It was obvious to me that Harry was not taken with Lucy. Here was one person who was immune to her 'quality'. He was full of himself, in any case, for he was being transferred to Leopoldville, and was not at all happy about the prospect. "Of course, it's a *good* thing for me to do," he said several times, referring to his career; but he didn't look as if the value of the position was going to compensate for the discomfort and isolation of the post. I couldn't help being sympathetic, because it was something that might easily happen to me one day.

I think Lucy irritated him by saying that Africa would be such an exciting place to live in. She was speaking, of course, for herself; to me it was clear that Africa was going to be a continual terror to Harry, who liked his comforts, good clothes, society and food. He wasn't seeking new or exotic experiences: he was so contented with everything that was familiar to him.

By some unlucky chance, little Avery Munee tracked us down. I thought we were in an extremely obscure little

restaurant off the Via Condotti, but apparently he was right about people going to the same places. When he sat down at our table, I felt that everything was getting out of hand. But I needn't have worried ; curiously enough, he and Harry seemed to take to each other. Harry was much better than I at knowing names, and so they found lots to talk about.

We were able to leave them together, though Munce did ask, as we went, where we'd be later.

I suggested the conventional thing to Lucy : a ride around the city in a carriage. She insisted on our finding a black horse, which turned out to be easier than it might have been.

"How do you think Rome compares with Paris?" I asked once we were under way.

"I haven't seen enough of it to say. I only arrived yesterday, you know."

"That's right. I'd forgotten. Well, take a good look at it now."

I was sorry for her sake, as well as my own, that it was neither true spring nor summer. The cold kept people indoors, so there was less visible gaiety than I had usually enjoyed in Rome. The tables sat hopefully on the pavements in front of cafés, but they were unoccupied and desolate. Paris I had seen many times this way, but it was a new experience for me in Rome. All the time I was feeling the wonder of having come so far in so little time. London, where I had awakened that morning, seemed to me a distant dot, without colour or vitality : not even a *place*, but only an idea.

Lucy was more thoughtful than I had ever known her. It seemed to me, in fact, that she was taking in very little of the streets we passed. I remembered her arrival in Paris, her excitement in the taxi. Here she sat far back against the leather seat, rocking against me with the rock of the carriage, and she allowed our silence to continue.

When she finally spoke, it was to ask me if I was in a better mood.

"Yes, I'm in a fine mood," I said. "I'm sorry if I seemed irritable before. Maybe I was just tired after the trip."

"There's no reason why you shouldn't have been annoyed. I don't expect people to be angels every minute of the day. Because then I'd have to be an angel, too, and that would be very hard."

I wished I could see more of her face as she spoke. As it was I only saw her in fragments as we passed street lamps; it was too pale a light to be fully revealing.

"What I was talking about before——" she started, and then had difficulty continuing.

"Look here, Lucy, you don't owe me any explanations. You know that, don't you?"

"Of course—it's not a question of owing. To tell you the truth, I'm very confused. I want to talk about it because it's something I don't understand."

"I see."

"You remember that silly thing I said to you that first night in Paris?"

"You said quite a lot of things."

"Yes, I know," she said quietly. "But you remember I told you I had this funny idea that I wanted to fall in love with somebody in Europe, wanted to be swept off my feet. . . ."

"Oh, yes, I remember that. I didn't think we were being very serious. But anyway—has it happened?"

"I don't know."

She waited, I suppose, for me to prompt her somehow. If we had been in the light I could have raised my eyebrows or nodded my head or made some gesture that created a question. Under the circumstances I could only say, "Yes?"

"I *think* it's happened—but it's not the way I expected it to be," she said.

"That's a great problem for you, isn't it?"

"What?"

"Oh—expectation and fulfilment. I mean, looking forward to something and then having it happen."

"Well, don't you have that, too?" she asked rather plaintively.

I had to consider before answering. "I should think everybody has ideas of some kind about the future and I guess everybody works it out in some personal way. You can be very cynical about it, I suppose, and say that nothing ever works out in reality the way you visualize it. Or you can say that it's a fifty-fifty proposition. Or you could even decide that the best of life is in the expectation itself which would mean you were working *against* fulfilment."

"Which do you believe?" she asked.

"Me? I guess I'd be inclined to think that it works both ways. Sometimes what happens is better than you expected. Certainly I don't think anything is ever as *bad* as you think it's going to be."

She reflected again. "What I thought was that if I fell in love I would *know*. That's what's so peculiar, I just don't know. The only thing that seems to have happened is that I'm worried and unhappy and—well, kind of afraid almost."

I laughed. "It does sound like a problem."

"Do you remember that painter we met at Mme Brunot's? Daniel Nordale?"

"Sure I do."

"You know he asked me to come to his studio. He asked you, too, didn't he? I went—that was after you'd gone back to London. His mother was there, a nice old lady. Anyway, we had a lovely time together. He showed me a lot of his pictures and I didn't know whether they were good or bad, to tell you the truth, except that I hear he has a great reputation. We had dinner together that night and I had a lot of fun with him. You see I've never known anybody like him at all. Back home you get into a kind of rut with fellows you knew from college and that sort of thing. And they're all going into their fathers' businesses or studying to be lawyers or doctors or something like that, and they all sort of talk alike and act

alike. Or if they're not that kind, they go off to New York or California and you never hear about them again.

"But what I mean is he's entirely different. He's full of peculiar ideas and he says things in an odd way. Oh, I don't mean there's anything wrong—he couldn't be nicer. . . . I mean he's just not like most of the people you meet. In a way he's very serious about everything, he's always trying to figure things out and see what they're really like. He talked to me as if I *knew* something, oh, about colour and textures and forms.

"You know, it was terribly interesting and strange, and mostly it made me feel dumb as hell. Not that he means to make me feel dumb. . . ."

I had been taken by surprise. It made me feel sad and a little lost. These things can happen so quickly. Too quickly. It was as if all you had to do was turn your back for a second, and people were off in all directions. I had not expected Lucy to change so soon. I had forgotten that life is full of little traps that catch even people like her.

Though she was still talking and I was listening, I didn't really have to know any more. So she had fallen in love with Nordale, or thought she had, or was confused by his falling in love with her—or seeming to. It all came to the same thing.

Yes, how would one know? How did one ever know, she asked me, as if I were an expert who conducted a service for the lovelorn.

How could one be sure? It wasn't as if a card came through the mail saying, You are in love. It wasn't something palpable that you could examine and come to conclusions about.

This was her first experience with this kind of insecurity. The self-questioning, the doubting, the mystery. Yes, I understood; unhappily I knew what she meant.

"So you see in a way I let René fool me because I really did want to get away from Paris," she was saying. "I

wanted to get away from *him* and then the minute I was on the train I missed ~~him~~ and wanted to cry and felt as if I had to go straight back to him."

"You did tell him you were going?"

"Oh, sure. He was furious. You see he seems to understand a lot about me and then that makes me mad. He said I was only going away because I was afraid of being in love."

I said: "Oh, you *have* talked about all that kind of thing with him?"

"Yes. He always wants to talk about it. He seems to be absolutely sure. . . ."

The coachman asked me whether he should cross the river. I said yes by all means, to take us up the Janiculum.

"I suppose it doesn't make much sense to ask you how you feel now?" I said.

"Well, I think I want to go back."

"He wasn't so furious then that he won't want you back?"

"Who? Daniel? There again I don't know. He certainly was angry!"

"You haven't telephoned him or anything from here?"

"No."

I thought hard. Actually I didn't want to advise her, didn't care to. But I said: "Why don't you phone when we get back to the hotel?"

"To-night?" She sounded shocked and terrified.

"Why not?"

Yes, there was no reason. That would clear up at least one of her doubts.

"But supposing he's not home!" she cried.

"You can only find out by trying."

"I'd feel awful if I heard the phone ringing and ringing and no answer at all. Don't you hate that? It's like somebody's dead on the other end of the line."

"No, Lucy, it's not like that at all. We'll go right back." I gave instructions to the coachman, who seemed a little put out. I decided that was just part of his act.

"Now you *do* want to telephone?" I said to her.

"Oh, I'm not sure. That's the thing that's so horrible. I'm not sure of him or myself or what I want or anything. . . ."

"What makes you think you have to be sure?"

I had to wait before she said, "I hadn't thought of it that way."

"You talk about these things as if you expect an affidavit, a guarantee of some kind. It doesn't seem to me it's that simple."

"No."

I laughed because I didn't really know what I was driving at, what I was trying to prove. Though I believed what I'd said, I wasn't anxious to propel her back to Norda. It wasn't my business. Besides, I found it hard to believe that there could be very much between them in so short a time.

Suddenly I wanted to change my tack. I think I could easily have persuaded her not to telephone that night, not to think of going back to Paris. It was in my power then.

But I didn't say anything and, fortunately, no one can tell now what effect I'd have had.

{ Five }

THE telephone call was a complete success; even though it began for Lucy as an ordeal. It was an incident she often referred to later: "that night when I called Daniel from Rome." It marked a point in her life—a date she was forced to remember. All lives have these moments of decision; it remains only afterwards to argue over and over again whether the particular moment was immensely fortunate or disastrous. Like a hinge it governs everything that follows.

Daniel couldn't have been nicer, she said when the call was over. He understood, he forgave. All he wanted was to see her, to assure her, to help her. It was as if he had provided that certainty she had lacked. That was the way she saw it, laughing and chatting with me in the lobby of the Excelsior. She was almost hysterical—with relief and happiness. We had to go out and have a drink.

She felt gay, buoyant. She had dropped ballast. The idea of him, the sound of his voice, his wanting her, his waiting for her—these things were almost better than being with him. At this stage, it was only a facsimile of reality that keyed her up and made her want champagne.

So she would go back to Paris. When? How? She put it to me, making me a safe, an honest René. It was a position I had put myself into by coming to Rome; I

couldn't back out now. I was caught in one of those self-imposed responsibilities that are the hardest to face.

And yet I was selfish enough to want a day in Rome with her. I suggested the train the following evening. I don't know why she didn't object. She must have been impatient to get back to Paris ; I doubted that Rome would mean anything to her in her present state of mind. Still, she agreed. She would wire Daniel and have him meet her. It didn't surprise me that there were tears in her eyes.

Her impatience began to show the next day. The weather was suddenly wonderful, all that I had hoped for. It was weather for relaxing, but neither of us could relax. All day long she checked on the time. There was no place that she wanted to linger : we were in and out of the Sistine Chapel, a smattering of churches, the Pantheon. I remember the day as one of sharp black shadows and glaring sun. Behind dark glasses, Lucy's eyes were a mystery. I had no idea how much she was seeing or cared to see. I found, during the day, that we were walking quickly—not at all like tourists, but like people with appointments and business to see to. It was as if she hoped the day would pass more swiftly that way.

Aside from the fact that I enjoyed being with her, it was not an enjoyable day. Dramatizing, I felt as if it were the last I should ever spend alone with her, just as it was the first. Her own excitement failed to infect me. In fact, I felt gloomy. As the hour for her departure approached, our feelings moved in opposite directions.

"You've been wonderful," she said, when her suitcases had been deposited in the train and she was standing with me on the platform. But that wasn't what she meant. I had been useful, perhaps ; in some way, I had made things smoother. It may be true that she would not have known what to do without me—but even that wasn't quite accurate. She hadn't needed *me*, only someone *like me*.

I felt a bit hollow when she had gone. And Rome seemed empty.

I sat for a while drinking at a café but I felt too lonely to get any pleasure in it. You have to be completely at ease to enjoy sitting at a table alone, being amused by the people in the street, seeing life as a fiction.

Disoriented, I walked again and sat down at another café. I didn't know what part of Rome I was in. Whatever I did was for lack of anything better. By to-morrow I would be back in London ; there would be Winky and friends and work. There might even be something new, something unexpected ; a letter in the mail, a cable, a sudden transfer back to Washington. Anything was likely : at least so life appeared to me that evening. And yet I felt empty and alone, out of contact.

It made me laugh when Avery Munce passed and then stopped to chat with me. He was appalled to learn that Lucy had left without giving him due notice.

" But anyway," he said, " I'm gonna have my hands full the next couple weeks. Looks like we're gonna finally start rolling any day now."

I let him tell me about the vagaries and perplexities of the motion picture industry. He had it all systematized : the industry was composed of ' worms ' and ' peacocks '. He admitted freely that he was a worm. He grovelled and grubbed around, did the dirty work. Without him and the other worms, the peacocks would never achieve anything. The peacocks, damn them, had the talent, the genius, the self-possession, the *name*. Like people in hotels, they rang bells and cried out : " Bring me the impossible ! " And the worms went down into their holes in the ground and brewed up the impossible for them, bringing it back, garnished, on a tray.

He was funny about personalities, knew too much about everybody for his own good. " The trouble," he said, " is that most people can't tell the difference between a worm and

a peacock. Sometimes they disguise themselves. Oh, boy, you gotta look behind those masks ! Me, I got an eagle eye. Maybe that's my trouble."

It hadn't occurred to me that he would admit to any trouble.

I felt better by the time he left me, and hoped he might think of me for a moment afterwards as not such a bad guy after all.

My loneliness was somehow less pervasive as I walked back to the hotel. I was not just feeling it, I was also observing it—and that made it more impersonal and more interesting.

I knew, too, that it would pass.

"Am I glad you're back !" said Winky when I arrived at the flat. "We're starting rehearsals to-morrow and I'm beginning to think I can't face it." How was the trip ? "

"Okay."

"Well, honey, we were all gathered to-day in Frank Tunnel's office—he's the producer. What *they* call the producer, anyway, we call him the director. He's quite nice. I guess they all are really. . . . What'll you drink ? "

"Anything." I was so glad that she was caught up in her work. That meant there would be no immediate interrogation ; I wouldn't have to tell everything at once. I was tired and thoroughly willing not to talk.

She stood by me while I unpacked. "There's quite a cast," she said. "They've got Beryl Jamison for the mother, and Kenneth Ware. He came over to me and said he was so pleased to be working with me, he'd heard about me and all. That was darling of him because, after all, he *is* a star and he'll be the draw."

"So you're happy about it ? "

"I'm nervous but excited, too. It's always that way when you start a show, it's like an adventure. . . . And, honey, it was absolute heaven being here. Mrs. Twigg and I had a good long talk yesterday. I was trying to show her that I

was domestic in spite of the eyeshadow. She wanted to know about things in the States—oh, you know, electric beaters and steam irons and sock-stretchers. You ought to have some stretchers for your woollen socks, she has a hell of a time with them."

"Why didn't she ever say anything?"

"She didn't *know*. She kind of expects her work to be hard and take her a long time and all that."

Looking at Winky, I realized how much people change after we know them. I was no longer aware of her theatrical look; it had begun to seem a natural part of her. Also I thought her more attractive than when we had first met. I could no longer think of her features as isolated: the nose, perhaps, a little too thin, the mouth too wide. It was as if the features I had looked on as possible faults in her had gradually become her special attractions; they were the things that distinguished her from everybody else, that made people stare or turn around when we walked into a bar or restaurant. It had always been flattering to be with Winky, because she was arresting.

She took my hand as we went back to the living-room and I knew, in that instant, that I was glad to have her there. I would have hated to come back to an empty, mute flat. But more than that, Winky provided an extra bonus of companionship, of repose and comfort.

"Now tell me about Rome and your Lucy," she said, "I'd love to go to Rome some day."

"Yes, you should. It was rather spoiled for me by Lucy's problems."

"Was it true about the money and everything?"

"Oh, yes!" I laughed. "Even worse. This man took her for a ride even stole five hundred dollars' worth of travellers' cheques."

Winky gave an impression of despair with her eyes sounds as if she shouldn't be let out alone. How odd!

"About twenty-two, I should think." Suppose, of

"Isn't she a bit retarded?"

I wouldn't have minded trying to explain Lucy to her, but I realized all at once how difficult it was. The very qualities I saw in Lucy were those that Winky was least likely to tolerate. She would have called Lucy's equanimity, 'dullness', her minor bewilderments, 'immaturity'. I didn't want Lucy to be misunderstood; nor did I want Winky to dislike her.

"That's not true, really," I said. "She has a kind of open quality—I guess you'd call it naïve. But you know—it's rather refreshing. I don't know *any* body naïve any more."

"Not even me?"

"*You!* You're about as naïve as a——"

"Don't tell me!" she cried. "I've suspected you had a mighty low opinion of me. But, anyway, did you get her straightened out?"

I said, "Yes," but wondered how true that was. In one sense, I could feel that I had done nothing at all. I asked myself what effect we ever have on one another. I had, perhaps, hurried things along a bit; but wasn't it likely that Lucy would have gone back to Nordale anyway?

I changed the subject by asking Winky whether she had heard from Croyden.

"He was there to-day," she said. "You know the way he sits with his hands cupped in his lap? Well, that's the way he sat the whole time, smiling and rather superior. He didn't have much to say to me—or to anybody, matter of fact. They're all kind of funny, with me I mean. Guess they think I'll have to be handled gently for a while. I don't think they *mind* me—yet."

"Why should they?"

"They could have cast an English girl in the part. I don't when anybody in the theatre likes outsiders, especially it was abs"

a good lot part you like?" I asked.

She frowned. "Yes, the part's fine, sort of juicy and sympathetic. But it's all so damned high-toned."

"I know what you mean."

"So much discussion about life and society and all that kind of thing. All I'm trying to do is marry this guy in the play and everybody talks about it and *talks* about it as if the whole world depended on it. . . . Anyhow, I think I know what I'm going to do with the part. Maybe I'll play it a little like your precious Lucy."

"I'd love to see that!"

"Think I can't?" She opened her eyes wide at me. "Baby, there's lots about me you don't know. I'll surprise you."

I looked at her admiringly, with the feeling that she easily could surprise me. In fact, she already had—several times.

"Do you think you're a good actress?" I asked.

The question made her look very serious. Rather primly, she said, "Yes—I do."

It was as simple as that.

• In the days that followed, I noticed that mail was arriving for Winky at my flat. That was the first time I realized her name was spelled with an 'o' rather than an 'a'. I also discovered a great many of her clothes in a closet I didn't often use. In a way amused by this, I suspected a plot.

On the week-end, while we were driving in the country, I said to her: "Are you trying to put one over on me?"

"Whatever do you mean?"

"I mean the way you're trying to slip into my flat on a semi-permanent basis without a real invitation."

She laughed and said with bravado: "If you're so impolite that you don't invite me, I decided obviously I had to act on my own."

"Oh, so you *did* come to a decision."

She lit a cigarette for me. It was a way, I suppose, of

catching her breath. "Yes, I decided it was silly for me not to have all the advantages you can offer me," she said.

"But I haven't offered them."

"I know," she sighed. "And I don't see why you're so smug about it. But do let's be serious about it for a minute, honey. Would you mind it so much? Because it doesn't make very much sense for me to keep a room at the hotel when I never use it."

"But you might," I suggested.

"When you're bored with me?"

"No, as a matter of fact I rather saw it the other way around."

We had to break off for a minute to decide which road we wanted to take. It was a problem we extended, doubtless because of its unimportance.

After that was accomplished, she said: "I sometimes think you don't care very much for me."

I felt at that point that something was on the verge of being settled. Because it was a bright English day, mild and green and fragrant, and because we were both in a pleasant frame of mind, I was willing to go ahead with a discussion that I had, only a few days before, successfully avoided.

"The point is," I said, feeling only a little self-conscious, "that I like you very much. And I presume you like me in spite of the way you belittle me——"

"I don't!"

"— But the word after all is 'like', no matter how you slice it. You're going to meet all sorts of people while you're here and especially after the play goes on. You'll go to parties and have young men—or old ones—leave cards at the stage door and all that kind of thing."

"You make it sound Edwardian," she laughed. "But go on."

It wasn't easy to go on, because neither of us, I think, wanted to be earnest and analytical and firm. But I

continued: "Well—believe it or not, the kind of arrangement you're suggesting is still considered unconventional."

"Oh, my Gawd," she interrupted explosively, "now you *do* sound like a diplomat. Do you mean the Ambassador would hear about it and have you fired in disgrace? Is that it?"

"Not at all," I said, wondering how to avoid sounding pompous. "I don't know *what* he would do, I hadn't even thought about that. Anyway, he's got a whole lot more to worry about than me."

"Okay. What else?"

I floundered.

I didn't know what else. By trying to make me specific, she forced my whole argument to evaporate.

"Look," she said, "I'm beginning to think you're a good old Puritan, even if you don't know it yourself. Most men are when you get right down to it. The whole thing is very much more simple than you're trying to make it. Believe me. There's only one question, honey: do you like having me around?"

"You talk about me belittling you but you probably don't realize that you have your own sweet way of underrating *me*. Oh, yes, you do: I have more feelings than you give me credit for, I understand a whole lot more than you think I do. The way you act it's as if you think I just fall into any available bed. Well, first of all, it's not very flattering to have you think of me that way. And secondly, it can't make you feel very proud of yourself. So both of us lose out that way. You see?"

"What you don't seem to get is that I really have a yen for you. I liked you the first time I met you at Croyden's. Oh, partly it was because I knew you didn't care for him and you were an outsider like me. But I also liked you a lot for other reasons."

"Such as what?"

"I'll tell you some time. Right now I'm not trying to

build you up but to break you down a little. I want you to face a couple of facts you have a way of hiding from. For instance, did you realize that I missed you while you were in Rome ? ”

I couldn't tell her that it had never occurred to me and that I wished it had.

“ The answer is probably no,” she went on. “ You see I even understand that. I thought a lot about you ; being in your flat made me wonder about you. It's not that you're a mystery to me or anything like that, it's just that I'm interested.”

I said, “ I'm beginning to think *you're* the mystery.”

“ Never ! The only mysteries I want are on the stage.”

“ I don't quite believe you, you know. Let's say you're rather confusing.”

“ How ? ” She was, of course, immensely interested in herself. I'm sure she wanted to hear me talk about her ; it was always important to her to know how she appeared to other people, how she put herself across.

“ Well—just one little thing for example ; you talk so many different ways. You have this kind of stagey ‘ honey ’ and ‘ doll,’ and ‘ baby ’ thing that you pull out suddenly. It makes you seem quite a different person.”

“ Cheap, huh ? ”

“ No, not cheap—but at least superficial and certainly not very serious. But then you *can* be serious and talk without that kind of specialized slang.”

“ Which way do you like me better ? ”

“ Oh, I don't know,” I laughed. “ I like you both ways. I only mean that it's confusing. You'd use ‘ honey ’ for anybody, so I don't assume that it means anything special when you say it to me.”

“ Maybe you shouldn't judge people by their speech, but, anyway, I see what you mean.”

“ Do you ? ” I put out my left hand for her to take while I steered with my right. I said : “ You know—I think

maybe this is really unnecessary, I haven't any complaints about you. My only feeling was that we both wanted to be casual and uninvolved."

"Except that it sounds like a line from a smart play in the thirties there's nothing wrong with that."

"No, of course not. But don't you think that if you moved into my flat"—the words embarrassed me—"there'd be a danger that—well, that it might become involved."

"So what? I'm not scared."

She made me wonder whether I was being unnecessarily complicated. Yet what I felt seemed to me complicated itself. By expressing a greater affection for me than I had assumed, she had automatically made herself more important to me. There was a curious possibility that my feelings would always lag behind and be cued by hers. If she were ever to say that she loved me, it would be possible for me to love her.

I didn't understand that. It made me think of Lucy and her problem of uncertainty.

"Why don't we try it, anyway?" I said.

She didn't answer at once. I looked at her to see whether she was displeased, but she smiled at me.

"Yes," she said, "I'll buy that."

By the time we had stopped at an inn on the river, she was talking about herself. It was a subject that never failed to animate her. For some reason, that day she was being nostalgic and reminiscent. Something made her recall that her best friend at school had been a girl whose name was Wilma.

"We were full of giggly secrets in those days," she said. "Mostly about fellows, of course. Wilma would tell me that Herbie Fuller or Joe Besterman had looked at her in the candy store—it never came to anything much more than that. Oh, occasionally some boy would ask us to have a soda. All the social activity centred around the ice cream parlour.

"We liked to talk in French—oh, very bad French, of course, but we were absolutely thrilled with ourselves, it was so grown-up. And yet everything made us blush. That's so funny when I remember it. We were always thinking that people were talking about us. We thought we were terribly naughty.

"And I guess we were, kind of. We wanted so much to be sophisticated, like illustrations in magazines. Smoking wasn't good enough for us when we were thirteen or fourteen, I guess. I remember one night we were alone in Wilma's house we decided to try whisky. You should have seen us trying to smoke and drink. It tasted like hell, naturally, and we couldn't understand for the life of us how anybody could drink it regularly. But we were determined, oh my, we were! We kept on feeling that it must do something for us; we knew what it meant to be drunk and all. Well, we both got sick. At least Wilma made it to the kitchen sink, but I vomited all over the living-room carpet. It always seemed to me for years afterwards there was a tremendous spot on the carpet."

She had never specified the town where she came from. It was in 'upper New York State', as she put it; about thirty miles from Buffalo. Her father was, of all things, a stockbroker and insurance agent, a big wheel in the town.

She went to New York to study dancing and starve. But the starving was easier for her than for many of her friends, because she could always, at an extreme, ask for her parents' support. Many of her friends couldn't count on money from home. In any case, this was towards the end of the war when nobody was starving in New York.

"Some people have a funny notion that an actress has to come from a poor family and make the grade the hard way. That's the expression all right: make the grade. Well—it simply isn't true, you know. Lots of show people come from wealthy backgrounds. It doesn't make a hell of a lot of difference except I have a sneaking feeling the ones with

money are usually 'lady actresses'. Have you ever thought of that?

"I think there definitely is that difference—lady actresses and the other kind—call them bitch actresses. For some reason that I can't figure out I'm the *other* kind! Bitch actress, I mean. If you'll pardon the comparison I think Bernhardt was, too. Don't you think the 'ladies' have much less range? Try to think of Maude Adams playing Sadie Thompson. . . . It's dangerous to be genteel."

We were sitting on a neat rich lawn and I was listening, but also wondering whether I *was* a Puritan. Or, at any rate, more of a Puritan than I should or needed to be. I wondered because I still have a vague irksome feeling that it was immoral for Winky to live with me. I had no objection to a 'set-up'—it wasn't that. What bothered me was that we were not sufficiently attached to each other. The 'set-up', it seemed to me, could only be justified by a strong and shared devotion—almost by necessity.

But I had a silent laugh at my own thoughts. She had labelled me right: no doubt of that. The fact that I was even thinking about it proved her right. Yes, she had me tagged and neatly wrapped up. I felt rather cramped in my pigeon-hole.

She insisted on lying on the grass while I sat beside her in a chair. It was late afternoon—lazy and quiet and drowsy. The sound of cars crossing a nearby bridge seemed far away and muted. From where I sat I could see the river, and there were swans, elegant and proud, a family of them skimming close to the bank. Winky thought them too arch when I pointed them out to her.

For a long time we were agreeably silent. And then we were interrupted by a girl who came running across the lawn in high pumps. She had been laughing, but stopped when she stood before us.

She was American, young; she clutched a white handbag and wore white jewellery.

I thought at first she had something to say to me. But it was to Winky she spoke.

"You're Isobel March, aren't you? I saw you in *Janine* last year in New York. I thought you were absolutely terrific!"

She stopped short and gave forth a loud nervous chortle.

Winky sat up and used her hand to shade the sun from her eyes. "Oh, thank you very much," she said, smiling.

"Yes, I was saying to my friends back there—we're just driving around England for a couple days—I said that looks like Isobel March and I felt I just had to run over and see if it really was you."

She had run indeed, and was still catching her breath. When she looked at me, I wished I knew how to assume an important-looking expression, but her glance brushed me off, after the merest second, as nobody. It was as if she'd seen an explanatory badge on me.

"It's awfully sweet of you to come over," said Winky. "Yes, I'm doing a play in London." I wondered why she didn't let the girl go.

"Oh, God, isn't that wonderful! Is it on now? . . . Oh, I'll be gone then. Oh, no, I'll come back for it from the Continent. Yes, I really will, I wouldn't dream of missing it. Honestly, it's been such a pleasure."

She ran back as fast as she had come. I was afraid she would trip but she managed it successfully, though awkwardly.

"Well now—that's kind of cute, isn't it?" said Winky.

"Does it happen often?"

"Every now and then. I always feel so sorry for them because it takes all their nerve and then they can't think of anything to say. I once did that with Katharine Hepburn myself; I was absolutely tongue-tied."

I said, "I never thought of you as having a public."

"Baby—my picture was on the cover of *Life*! You don't appreciate me."

Maybe she was right, I told myself. Here she was, a

personage, with a public life, an audience, people who recognized her in the streets. Successful enough to be in a Croyden play ; a name that came up in producers' offices.

But I couldn't think of her that way. That was not how I knew her best ; her ' real life ' was no enigma to me. I was, after all, in a special category.

It was on the way home that I reminded her that she'd never given me a nickname.

She said, " I've been thinking about it but I haven't found anything just right."

" Sounds bad."

" Oh, no—something'll click one of these days. Don't be impatient."

§ Six §

IT took me something like two days to realize how natural it would be for Winky to be living in the flat. In some ways it hardly made a difference. There was her untidiness, of course ; and the smell of her perfumes. The bathroom, somehow, became a crowded place.

But in other ways the difference was extremely comforting to me. She brought with her a sense of vitality that had been lacking in the flat. Her personality filled in the empty spaces. The flat itself almost became something new to me, as if I had just moved into it. I remembered when I had first found it, after weeks of futile searching. Although I had enjoyed it, it had never quite become *mine* in feeling. I realized the furniture wasn't mine, or the pictures, or many of the books. It was Winky who made any idea of the actual owner disappear ; she was too strong a person to tolerate ghosts.

Mrs. Twigg tried hard to be big and brave about Winky. She must have wrestled with her middle-class conscience and settled it in the end, I suppose, by muttering about "those Americans." Anyway she didn't hand in her notice ; she didn't even sniff or frown or growl. I hardly ever saw her, of course ; but when I did, she spoke very little, and the notes she wrote me became extremely terse, to the point.

Or maybe I imagined it.

It was July. Both Winky and I were working very hard now. Negotiations of a delicate sort were going on both in

Korea and in Iran ; in my office we were involved in both. I remember that year, too, as one in which many important people died : Shaw, Gide, Hearst, Bevin. In the end it didn't turn out to be any more crucial as a year than any other. But I have a feeling that I thought it was during that summer, a year when many things would be decided. Probably I was wrong.

During July, Winky was certainly under a strain. I was aware of it even on Sundays, the only time we had a long stretch together. Sometimes, when she was rehearsing at night, I would call for her at the theatre. I always came a little early so that I could go through the stage door and find a seat in the empty theatre. I could feel, in the darkness, like a secret spectator who was not meant to be there.

By that time of night everyone on stage was exhausted. They simply spoke their lines in conversational tones without characterization, went over the 'business', reviewed their positions and movements.

I could see what disheartening work it was. No sooner was something set and learned than Tunnel would decide it was all wrong. He was not . . . all tempestuous, but very precise and exacting. They would all flop down while he himself re-examined the passage in pantomime, shaking his head, saying "no," and finally coming up with something new. The actors were so well disciplined that, weary as they were, they'd rise and try it again, make mistakes, have to be corrected, repeat and repeat. The French word for rehearsal seemed so much more apt : *répétition*.

I discovered an unexpected pride in finding Winky as competent as the others—like a father watching his daughter at a party. For one thing, she had her lines absolutely pat ; the others still floundered from time to time. I wondered why I had ever thought there was something lacking in her voice. She had excellent control of it, and it was surprisingly full of body, as compared with the sharper British voices of

the others. She had created an appealing awkwardness of movement that was exactly right for the part of a young girl with more money than charm. In all the interplay that Tunnel tried to squeeze out of Croyden's static passages, Winky seemed to me to have a brilliant instinct for integrating her own movements and reactions with those of the rest of the cast. It pleased me to note that Tunnel rarely had to correct her or repeat his suggestions. What he never needed to do was teach her how to act. In several other cases—especially the stick of a young man who was supposed to be the victim of Winky's affections—Tunnel had to be coach as well as director. It looked to me as if his job required extraordinary stamina.

Winky told me that Croyden came only rarely to rehearsals : that was part of the tradition. He had the choice of director and didn't feel it was his place to do that job once he had selected his man. He almost never rewrote, like ordinary workaday playwrights (meaning practically all others).

But on one of the nights when I had come to watch and then take Winky home, Croyden did show up unexpectedly. It was a particularly late evening—about eleven or so—and the entire company were nervous and out of sorts. Nothing had gone right. Beryl Jamison, for all her years of experience, had had a good cry in the afternoon. Sheer nerves, Winky told me.

Croyden came in unobtrusively, almost questioningly—though he spoke to no one. He was in tails, looking grand and austere. I was thankful that he couldn't see me in the darkened theatre. Without particularly looking around him, he sat down in a centre aisle seat and lit a cigarette. His stillness and composure struck me as uncanny. No man, it seemed to me, could be so thoroughly satisfied with himself. He was like a man who, in fear of anything accidental, had disciplined his impulses ; I suspected that his stillness did not emerge from inner quietude. But on the other hand, I

had no real reason to suspect him. Maybe I only envied him.

Everyone on stage except Tunnel, facing the other way, caught sight of Croyden. When Tunnel finally became aware, he turned and called out : "Hello, Robert ! I'm afraid we're just about to call it a day."

Croyden waved his cigarette but said nothing.

As the actors resumed, everything that they had said and done before became slightly stilted, as if they were doing a poor imitation of themselves. It was almost imperceptible, but it was there. I saw it at once—in Winky.

Beryl Jamison had been breaking down over an especially difficult line : "It would be futile, I presume, to beg gracious forgiveness at a time like this when all charity is dead."

It was a stupid, pompous line, but she had learned to say it with a certain style, an underlining of irony, except near the middle when she invariably broke down on the word 'gracious'. And it was a typical Croydenism. He didn't care about the unfortunate juxtaposition of g's, which made it impossible to say anything but 'bay gracious' or 'beg racious'.

When she fluffed again this time, Jamison suddenly came forward to the front of the stage and called out to Croyden.

"Mr. Croyden," she said, "couldn't I possibly say that line without the word gracious?"

He rose politely, but portentously. "*Why*, my dear?" he asked.

"Because of the g's next to each other. I simply cannot say it and I'm afraid it puts me off for the rest of the scene."

Croyden walked quietly down the aisle, until he stood close enough to speak without shouting.

"I'm sure you can say it if you give it thought. Let me see the line."

She knelt and handed the script down to him, pointing out the place. He studied it for a moment, blowing great streams of smoke out into the theatre.

Then he straightened up and, rather softly, spoke the line without the slightest awkwardness. As a performance it was certainly impressive, but it didn't blind anyone to the inadequacy of the line. The company went about their work again with tightened lips and tried to forget Croyden was there. As a matter of fact, I think I was the only one who noticed him leave.

In the end, though, the joke was on him, because Jamison always left out the offending word after that. No one bothered about it.

When we were finally out in Shaftesbury Avenue, Winky said: "Wasn't it awful? I do wish Croyden would stay, away even more often."

"I noticed that he bothered you."

"Yes, it's true, he does. And everybody else. Even Tunnel of Love gets tense, which is unusual for him. He's an awfully nice guy, isn't he—Frank, I mean. So steady—unexcitable. You know he's got a wife who isn't all there, in a home somewhere. Isn't it a shame? Rose Barberry was telling me about it at lunch."

When we got home she was talking about Croyden again. She imitated him beautifully: "Why, my dear?" "When charity is dead."

"I'll bet he thinks people go around quoting him like Shakespeare," she said petulantly.

And then she turned back to herself: "Do you think I'm going to be all right? Now tell me honestly. What do you think?"

I started by laughing, but she stopped me. So I said: "Yes, you're going to be all right—baby. There, you feel better?"

"Very much," she murmured with a grin. "You think I'm kidding but I'm really dead serious. It's important to me to know how you react to it. . . . Tell me, am I at all like your little Lucy? Seriously."

"Not very much."

“ Oh hell ! I guess I'll have to meet her in the flesh some day and see what I do wrong.”

It was during this period of Winky's rehearsals that I finally received a letter from Lucy. I had been, for a period of about two weeks, in a state of suspension as far as Lucy's affairs were concerned ; had no inkling of what had happened on her return to Paris, or what her current plans were. But when I saw the letter on the hall table I realized how absorbed I had become in Winky's personality, her work, her talent. Lucy's silence had not made me impatient or anxious, even though I had wondered about her. I felt a little ashamed as I opened the envelope.

“ Now that we have our apartment,” she wrote, “ I've got the time to sit down and write a letter. . . .”

Then everything was all right. I lit a cigarette, because the letter was long and I wanted to read it all—comfortably.

“ It's the darlinest place you ever saw, on a little street you probably don't even know, called Rue Git le Cœur. (I just looked out at the street sign from the window to make sure about that accent.) It's right near the river on the Left Bank and it's a very old building. It was pure luck getting it, because it happened to belong to a friend of Daniel's. (I don't think I'll ever call him Dan or Danny, the way I would like to. I tried it once, but I didn't like the reaction.)

“ It was quite a business moving in and getting things settled. Unfortunately I'm not much of a housekeeper, I'm afraid that part of my education was sadly neglected. I once had a class in Domestic Science, but all I can remember from that is how to make cocoa. I didn't have any idea of half the things I was going to need, and finally I went running to Mme Brunot one day and practically burst into tears. So now SHE KNOWS ALL and gave me lots of advice about what things I could buy in cheap places like the Samaritain. You wouldn't think a rich woman would be

so anxious to find bargains, but I'm beginning to think that's just plain French. Mme Brunot also insisted on giving me some things of her own—mostly silver. She got very confidential and told me about her daughter (I never knew she had one) who married a Mexican and lives there now. (I mean in Mexico.) It turns out that the Brunots are Jewish and so this marriage made them rather unhappy. (I haven't quite figured that all out, but it's something like that.)

"Some things still seem very strange to me, though I *am* slowly getting used to Paris. When I came up in our elevator the other evening I found a large, horrible rat was going up with me. I screamed, but there wasn't anybody to hear me. So we went up together, and I got out safely. I decided the rat must have been scared of me, because he didn't move once except to twitch his whiskers. Daniel laughed when I told him—that's a man for you. He said there are rats that come up from the river, but that they generally run away from people. This one must have been lost, poor thing. (It really was a nasty experience.)

"Daniel works amazingly hard. I had a funny idea that artists just sat around and waited for inspiration. But it isn't that way with Daniel at all. He goes to his studio every afternoon right after lunch. It's just like he was going to an office. I still feel mighty lonely when he's gone but I'm getting used to it and there are still thousands of things to do around the apartment. Besides, I'm studying French very seriously. Daniel found a sweet old lady for me who comes in at 4 every afternoon, and we have *des petites conversations* or *causeries*. She's a dear old thing who always wears lace gloves and looks like something out of another world. But she's very strict with me and makes me talk about all sorts of things, and she never gets off the track.

"When are you coming over to see us? Why do you want to stay in rainy old London? I'm sure you must have a vacation coming up some time this summer. Please let me know if you will be in Paris. After all, you have become

a very special friend and I have a feeling that I would turn to you if I ever needed help. But don't let that scare you away.

"I forgot the best part. René Saulieu is in jail. It was very funny the way it all happened, and it proves that he was nothing but an amateur in the racket. He sent some girl friend of his to the American Express Office to sign the checks and get them cashed. Can you think of anything more stupid? Everybody in the office had already been notified by your friend in Rome that my checks had been stolen. I think it was darned clever of them to remember my name. One of the men there saw it was a forgery and the girl was questioned. She eventually gave René away.

"When the police got in touch with me, you could have knocked me over with a feather. I was so pleased to get the money back that I would have been willing to drop the whole thing. I really felt sorry for René, especially when it turned out he was such a fool. But Daniel was furious and said I mustn't let the man get away with it. So I was involved in hearings, and the judge was very nice to me and made things easy. Poor René, he looked so sad, just like a little boy who broke his father's watch. He's such a tiny man, with a tiny black moustache. I felt as if a good spanking was all he needed, but now he's in jail—and I often feel it was entirely my fault.

"I haven't anything more to write about except that I don't think I've ever been so happy in my whole life. Have you ever really been in love? You should try it. I feel as if everybody should be in love. There are some things about Daniel that are a little difficult for me, but I guess it's because he's a painter. I'm very proud of him and want to help him in any way that I can.

"My real problem is what I'm going to tell my family. I'm supposed to go back home in September, but I've already cancelled my reservation. I'm trying to think up an excuse

to stay in Paris that will convince them. That's not easy ! But I guess I'll work it out somehow or other.

" Please let me hear from you and do come to Paris some time soon. I would try to make a lovely dinner for you. And I do want you and Daniel to be good friends.

" I finally wrote a letter to Marianne. It was nothing but apologies. I am waiting to see whether she will answer. (Don't breathe it to a living soul, but I don't think Marianne likes me.)

" Oh, I'm putting the telephone number below so you can call up if you come here.

" I don't think I've ever written such a long letter in my life before. I'm all worn out now.

" Love, Lucy."

§ Seven §

I COULDN'T imagine why Victor Widdgett should invite me to lunch. Up to the time in Paris he had been nothing more than a person I sometimes saw with Marianne or at the Croyden 'functions'. Heretofore, he'd had to be re-introduced to me each time we met. If that week-end in Paris had led us to entertain ideas of friendship, I felt sure we'd have met again sooner. As it was, it seemed to me that the possible period in which friendship might have been established had passed by several weeks.

However, I met Victor as he asked me to at Prunier's at ten minutes past one, expecting that there must be some particular problem he wanted to take up with me. People never quite understand what it is one does at an Embassy, and so they attribute unlimited powers to those who have practically none. I had gotten used to the fact that all sorts of foreigners expected me to be able to advise them when they were in personal quandaries or facilitate any affairs they had in the States. I certainly had no reason to consider Victor above a spot of special pleading.

He greeted me heartily, saying that I mustn't expect this quite to measure up to the Paris Prunier's where we'd eaten together. But he knew the maître and usually didn't fare too badly.

I could see by the way we were ushered into the dining-room that the maître obviously knew him.

"I've been meaning to see you for some time," Victor said to me while I observed his red striped tie and lemon yellow waistcoat.

"That's very nice of you, Victor," I said.

"Oh, I'm a jolly nice bloke once you get to know me."

During the ordering I was very disappointing to him because I chose plain cold lobster with mayonnaise, and turned down his more recondite suggestions. I said I didn't mind if the chef got upset. He finally gave up and had lobster too, but fussed about the wine, bringing his excellent command of French into play. The waiter was clearly delighted, intimating all the time that he had a special bottle up his sleeve: one that only 'M. Vigette' deserved.

We were able to settle down then with an Italian vermouth. Victor was quite capable of making small talk. "Have you been working frightfully hard?" he asked.

"Yes, rather."

"I have, too. It's astonishing what you can do if you push a little. Turned out three articles last week, besides a scurrilous book-review. It's all a mad dash to get some cash. I've also got a book of my own coming out this autumn."

"So the prospects are good?"

Victor gave me a pained grin. "I'd hardly say *that*, old man. One only manages to live this way. Sheer survival. Not enough—not nearly enough."

He ate his lunch with rather unattractive relish, munching and chewing and swallowing all the time he kept on talking. He also ate as hastily as an office worker who has only half an hour off. I was perfectly certain that he had all the time in the world. It was a shame to watch him quaffing his wine as if it were a pint of bitter; it wasn't the flavour he'd remember, only the label.

"I'll tell you what's come up," he said finally. "I've had an offer to lecture in the States. University—or is it just a college?—called Bennington. D'you know it?"

"Yes, it just happens that I do. Once went up to visit a girl there. Quite a memorable week-end."

"All girls, isn't it?"

"Yes. That should please you."

He chortled. "That's rather what I wanted to know. Is it customary for men to lecture in girls' colleges?"

"Certainly."

He thought about that for a bit. "What do you think it would be like?"

"Very nice, I'd say. Lovely country and all that. I think Bennington girls are said to have high IQs."

"Oh, really? You seem to know quite a lot about it."

I don't, actually. One just hears these things."

He was still puzzled. "I can't quite imagine what it would be like. To tell you the truth, girls as young as that positively frighten me."

I had to laugh at that, but I understood what he meant. In fact, the picture of Victor, tall and natty, a minor example of the British eccentric, standing up in front of a group of eager and intense American college girls, was somewhat droll in itself.

"But what are these girls like?" he asked earnestly. "I must say I quite liked that girl we met in Paris—her name was Lucy, wasn't it? Are they all like her?"

"She's a little older than they are," I explained. "The girls you'd have are between seventeen and twenty."

"That young? That's even worse than I expected."

"Oh, you'd manage very well, Victor. First of all they'd all fall in love with you."

I think he was pleased by that idea. He said: "But that would be hell, wouldn't it? I mean to say you couldn't do anything about it."

"Oh, I don't know. . . ."

"Really? No—you're being Mephistophelian now. I detect a smile on your face, old man, I think you're having me on. As a matter of fact I've heard that the goddess Morality reigns supreme at American universities."

"I'd like to know who your informants were," I said.

"That's beside the point. But do please tell me something about American girls. Do you think I'd ever be able to understand them?"

"You'd understand *them* easily enough. The question is whether they'd understand you."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because you'd be something strange to them. They'd probably think you were frivolous—and cute."

He wriggled in his chair, trying to reallocate his legs. "I don't quite understand you. But you still haven't told me anything about them—American girls, I mean. Tell me about Lucy, for instance."

Since he was serious about the question, I thought about it for a while. In terms of actual facts, I didn't know very much about Lucy. I understood, of course, much better than he could the kind of background from which Lucy came. There were all kinds of questions about her that I would never need to ask, and which would be most puzzling and significant to him.

I knew that it would be false to present my view of Lucy to him as anything typical; in fact, I couldn't really give him any *typical* picture at all. But I tried to do the best I could with a few generalizations.

"I suppose a girl like Lucy comes from a family with a good deal of money," I started, but he interrupted me at once.

"Why is it you Americans always begin with money?"

"Do we?—Well, actually I started that way because I wanted to show you how little it counts. One of the odd things about America is that having money, as Lucy does, doesn't make her so very different from girls with less money. Of course, a very rich girl might have been brought up by a governess, but that's pretty rare. I'd be willing to bet that Lucy was brought up at home very much like all girls in the middle-class, upper or lower."

"You mean no nannies and that sort of thing?" he said.

"Yes. You can draw whatever conclusions you want from that, but the fact remains that most American children are brought up within the family—not off in a nursery.

"The chances are also good that Lucy, our example, went to a public school—not *your* kind of public school—but you know all about that, I'm sure. Anyway, there again, she'd be pretty much like any other girl. I mean money wouldn't play a very large part in her life except that her clothes would be more expensive and she'd have more magnificent presents. And I suppose you could say, too, that she'd have been exposed to a cocktail-drinking country club sort of life earlier than kids with less money. I think that even if she went to a private school it's more likely to be a 'progressive' sort of thing, not at all rigid and formal."

"I see—that *would* make a difference."

"You mean as comparing British and American girls. Yes, I think it makes a difference. It certainly cuts down class feeling among Americans—girls *or* boys, of course. Oh, and another thing is that Lucy would have been likely to go to co-educational schools, as we call them."

"Is that the most common thing?" he asked.

"Yes, very much so. You understand I'm generalizing. There are any number of American kids who don't go to co-educational schools for one reason or another, but they're definitely in the minority.

"I suppose it's at the high school stage that Lucy would begin to interest you—when she's getting to be about sixteen. Well, here there might be changes. For instance, Lucy may well have gone to a girls' finishing school—that is, just girls. But she'd be awfully boy-conscious by then. There might be a nearby boys' school; there often is. Or else she'd keep her contacts going in her home town, as well as making a play for her older brothers' friends. And then there'd be school dances and things when she could invite the young man of her choice. Horrifying affairs, really; but at the time they seem

the most important events in life. There's so much jockeying for position by then ; the girls try so hard to look grown up. And the boys are so young or so spoilt or ugly, or everything wrong. The luckier girls at this stage might know a fellow at Yale or Harvard who would invite them to a dance or football game. That, I should say, is the greatest thrill of *that* particular period. You see them in trains sometimes : two or three girls together, with their expensive suitcases that hold the important dresses. They're so pretty and so fresh. You can tell just where they're going. I always feel that nothing will ever make them so happy again."

Victor said : " It all sounds rather jolly. But do the sexes really mingle so freely even at that tender age ? "

" Oh, sure. A girl of sixteen at home is definitely dating. Or, if she's not, you can bet she's a little worried about it. There's such a sense of competition. And you see, by the next year or so she'll probably be going to college and that's where her dating will become a routine thing—and probably more serious.

" Naturally, there are lots of other things that happen. Summer vacations for one thing. I should think a girl like Lucy would have thought she was in love at least once during a summer vacation with the family at the ocean or wherever they go. And more than likely it would be a fisherman's son or a Portuguese, at any rate someone the family might think rather inappropriate. *She* wouldn't see why—Lucy, I mean. To her it would be terribly romantic, her first great love, something she'd remember and sigh over when she got old. But the family would take a hand, they'd probably be quite sensible about it, because people like that are usually so hipped on psychology and the right way to handle a child. You know the way people are advised not to scream at a child in a dangerous position or you're sure to make it fall ? Well, the parents would get at the girl without screaming ; they'd coo at her all the time they were getting her out of danger. And our Lucy, poor girl, would probably have a

good cry and she might even write a letter or two to the boy afterwards—but then you see she'd be going to college that fall and so she'd soon get over him."

"But tell me," said Victor, who was certainly being an interested listener, "would she have gone to bed with this young fellow, the fisherman's son?"

"Oh remember, Victor, it doesn't *have* to be a fisherman's son, sometimes it's the prospective heir to a great fortune and the family couldn't be happier about it. The only reason I guess I said that is a feeling I have that some time in every American girl's life she feels the attraction of someone outside her own environment, a dissatisfaction with her own familiar kind. . . . But to get back to our case, whatever her young man may have been, he's not likely to outlast the summer. He's only a stage in her development and so he's dispensable. As to her going to bed, I should say that would depend a great deal on the boy, his experience and forcefulness. I think the girl is generally ready for anything by that time. But it more frequently doesn't happen because the boy isn't. If it's an older man—well then, anything might happen."

"Yes, I suppose that's true," Victor said reflectively.

"And then there's college," went on, being well launched by now and rather interested myself in seeing what kind of picture I could create. "I should say that's the most important time of all for a girl like Lucy. It's in those four years that she has to make the terrible decision. Will she work, have a career, wait a bit for marriage? Or will she devote those four years to getting herself a husband? You see it's quite a problem. And here it's pretty hard to generalize. I suppose the great majority still want to get married; it's the most natural, logical thing."

"But Lucy isn't married."

"Oh, no, it doesn't often happen *at* college. It may happen there, God knows, but more often it simply begins there, that's where they get their experience in how to hook a man. They get wily, they learn tricks, they learn to want something

more than a fisherman's son. But on the whole they don't get disillusioned—yet.

"I somehow think it's a lot better if they *do* meet their husband while they're in college. Because the opportunity's never quite so good again. If they're not married by the time they get out of college, they either bore themselves to death at home or do take jobs that they're not a bit interested in."

"But surely," Victor said, "surely there are lots that don't go to college?"

"Certainly. Those that can't afford it and those that simply don't *want* to. But I thought we were talking only about those who do. After all if you go to Bennington you're not, going to be involved with the girls who don't go to college are you?"

"Quite. You have such a logical mind. But tell me what do you suppose they *think* about?"

"That's easy—men."

Victor chortled again. The merest hint of sex always produced in him a childish combination of embarrassment and glee. He said: "You know, I think that applies as well to the English girl of the same type."

"I'm sure it does. Would you have it any other way?"

I don't think I really had clarified very much for Victor. In fact, I wanted to start afresh and approach the subject a different way. I wanted to tell him what Lucy's family probably was like. I wanted to conjecture about her friends and relatives. But as far as Victor was concerned, it remained only a personal problem: should he accept the offer?

In the end I said yes, he should go without question. Even if it was only a matter of educating himself. But he was not by any means convinced. He couldn't any more visualize himself talking to a class full of girls than I could. The incongruity of it was a hurdle for him.

"Of course, I do love to talk," he said. "But it wouldn't really be quite the same thing, would it?"

He came back to what I'd been saying. Hadn't I laid too

much emphasis on sex? Didn't they just play most of the time?

I admitted that that was the great difficulty when you started generalizing; you always ran the risk of over-emphasizing some aspect of your picture.

"Now talking about Lucy," he said; "she seemed to me in some way peculiarly pure. The way she handled those French boys, for example."

"Oh, I didn't mean to apply that American girls are wanton——"

"What a strange word to use!"

We became less serious after that, had another bottle of very good wine, and ended up in a fairly rollicking mood. When I saw that lunch had lasted nearly an hour and a half, I said I had to leave. I was wasting the taxpayers' money.

Victor never knew whether I was serious when I said things like that. I had to explain very soberly that I wasn't, that I worked many extra hours and week-ends to make up for just such occasions as this.

When we came out of the dining-room I saw Marianne Croyden sitting at the bar with a sandy-haired young man in a green suit. I think she must have caught sight of us at the same time.

I was prepared to greet her where she was, but she left her conversation and came to us across the room.

"You are *méchants*, both of you. I haven't seen you in years," she said.

"My dear," Victor answered, "I've just been explaining how hideously busy I've been. In a few days you'll see the fruits of my labours; my name will be in print everywhere."

"But you," she said to me, "you might at least have phoned. Or was that last dinner so awful that you've decided to cut me?"

"Not at all——" I started.

"Though I must say that actress was rather a trial."

"What actress?" Victor said. "Somebody you've kept from me?"

"No, no," Marianne laughed. "Not your type at all, Victor dear. Although"—she turned back to me—"Daddy says she does rather a good job in the play."

"All this professional tattle," Victor complained. "When can I see you, Marianne, or are you taken up all the time now with *that*?" He gestured towards the man she had left at the bar.

What surprised me was that Marianne blushed. It was very becoming to her, but uncharacteristic.

"Not a bit," she said. "Now ring me up—both of you." And she went back to her place at the bar.

I realized that she'd been looking extremely attractive. I couldn't tell whether she'd changed anything about herself, or whether it was just the look of good health and spirits.

Victor actually dug his elbow into my side when we were out on St. James's Street.

"Did you see the chap she was with?" he asked.

"Yes, but I don't think I know him."

"Thought not. It's the Earl of Basking—David."

"I'm impressed."

"You should be. And I'll bet old Croyden is, too. He's probably got his fingers crossed and watching it all like an old bordello-keeper. He'd like nothing better than a marriage like that for Marianne. His own daughter in Debrett . . ."

We had started up towards Piccadilly. I was amused by Victor's gossipy tone of voice and wondered why he should so much enjoy telling me this.

"And this man's available?" I asked.

"I don't know how available he is. He's unmarried, which helps. But I'd love to be reading Croyden's thoughts now. You know, Marianne used to be thick with a Cambridge crowd—intellectuals and poets and that, but not a title in the lot."

"That's important, is it?" I said.

"My dear fellow, it's important to Croyden. Haven't you tumbled to him yet? I've been noticing recently that Marianne was less in evidence among her crowd than usual."

"You think Papa's seen to that?"

"Beyond a doubt," said Victor. "Oh yes, he'd be certain to wean her away from useless people of that kind. The girl's ripe for marriage. In fact—well, I won't be nasty. But, you see. . . . I once had a gleam in the eye meself for Marianne."

"I rather thought so," I said.

"Did you? I thought I kept it fairly private. Anyway, Marianne was rather keen on me, too, for a while. Funny thing, Prunier's was our favourite meeting place. Rather unsentimental of her to go there with Basking. We used to sit there for hours, with the waiters grinning at us lasciviously. Eventually the old man came bearing down on me. Several unplanned little conferences, never touching the subject, of course. Oh, he's very subtle—like a dear old dragon giving off scented vapours. But deadly. He knew exactly how to make me feel like a worm.

"But never mind, it's all over. Croyden and I avoid each other—it's very easy for both of us—but we smile sweetly in public. Grand losers, we English. But mark my words, there's something afoot between Marianne and our David. Basking's even got some money which makes him altogether too good to be true."

We had reached the Piccadilly corner and I was about to cross the street. As I shook Victor's hand, I said, "Do you have any regrets about Marianne?"

He smiled at me and looked fairly human for once.

"Dear chap," he said, "it's the cross I bear."

§ *Eight* §

THE play opened in Manchester on a Monday towards the end of July. I drove Winky up on Sunday and stayed over to see the opening. Even if she had not wanted me to be there I would have done it. Fortunately she did want me ; she called me her hold on the outside world. Said with affection, this sounded quite endearing.

It was a new and unfamiliar kind of experience for me and, in a curious way, once we were sailing along the road to Manchester, I began to feel for the first time personally concerned in the whole enterprise. It was not only for Winky's sake that I hoped for success. I had seen so much of the play, watched its progress so closely and intimately, that it was almost as if I myself required its success.

And yet I was not, to put it mildly, excessively hopeful. The most I could wish for was that Croyden's name might pull it off again, in spite of all the odds. I couldn't tell how those really involved in the play felt about it. Tunnel, at the end of rehearsals, gave a cheerful and rather witty little talk which was not just optimistic ; it took success for granted. Even Winky confessed to me that she began to see more in the play than had been visible to her at the beginning. It was mostly the work of Tunnel, she said ; on our way north she was full of admiration for him. She had come to the conclusion that he really understood and felt the play ; for all of them he had brought out its point. I noticed that she now used the

word 'subtle' with great freedom when she discussed the play; earlier, she would have said at least 'obscure'.

But I must say I felt tense—much more, it seemed, than the rest. After four weeks of rehearsals, I suppose, their nerves were simply ground down. They were almost hypnotized by the repetitiveness of it all into a state of security. That was probably the way it had to be; their performance would be a kind of sleepwalking. They had begun to take their parts as much for granted as they did their own lives. I wouldn't have been at all surprised if Winky had told me that in her dreams she was just as often Peggy, her stage role, as she was herself. (I always meant to ask her about that, but forgot.) As the outsider, however, I had no part to assimilate and the play could never acquire for me quite the same degree of specious reality.

In the bar of the Midland Hotel we found Kenneth Ware drinking by himself. We would have been glad to keep to ourselves, but he insisted on our joining him.

"I have found," he told us, "that the only way to spend the evening before an opening is to drink. It's been my practice for many many years now, since I first discovered it by accident. About 1904 it was—went to a cocktail party the evening before and got absolutely blotto. Thought the gin was vodka—or vice versa. I was doing Shakespeare in those days, having a spot of trouble over the lines, but you know, I was letter-perfect the next night! Never gave it another thought. I tell you it makes everything clearer the next day—you see if it doesn't."

Winky said that all she'd ever get out of it was a hangover, and then she'd be hopeless the next day.

"Never have hangovers myself," said Ware. "Something about the constitution, I expect. Couldn't do it otherwise. . . . What'll you have—gin?"

Since we had just had dinner, however indifferent, we ordered brandy. But Ware was having double pink gins; he added very little water.

I had not had much to do with Ware during rehearsals. We'd met, of course, and occasionally had exchanged a word or two of absolutely no significance. He had always seemed to me a little austere, and yet entirely justified in keeping himself aloof. He had made me feel that he considered acting a business, not a party.

But one could not watch the cast in action without being aware of him at every turn. He was one of those people who had so much experience of the stage that he quite properly treated it like a room in his own house. Whenever I had observed him, he had seemed completely at his ease. It was as if nothing on the stage could ever take him unawares again; he had been through it all. Some actors, I presume, have a kind of innate stage-presence; their whole personality emerges only when the curtain rises; there—behind the footlights and within the stage's three walls—they show their style, their flair. They are pre-eminently at home. In their own living-rooms they may be spineless, colourless, generally insipid; the uninvited guest says to the friend who's brought her along, "Who's that dull little man leaning on the mantel as if he owns the place?" But on the stage these same dull little men are keen, ardent, mischievous, contemptuous—anything that they're asked to be. Kenneth Ware certainly had this kind of command of the stage; anyone would know he 'owned' it. In fact, he seemed to reverse the natural order of things: sitting with him in the bar as we were was almost like sitting in a stage-set and speaking from script. Up to that evening I had regarded him illogically as one of a race apart, as one of the 'stage-men'.

By the time we joined him he must have been drinking for quite a while. He appeared to me to be on the verge of getting drunk.

"You're a very lucky young fellow," he was saying to me. "Very lucky indeed to be the special friend of such a charming and talented girl as our Isobel."

"Thank you kindly," said Winky.

"You know it, my dear," said Ware. "Oh, yes, you know it well enough. If you didn't, you'd never be an actress. And you *are* an actress, Isobel, believe me you are. I don't mind telling you now that when I first heard they were importing you for the part, I gave a mighty groan. These young cultured American girls who want to be on the stage—that's what I thought you were."

"You old hypocrite! And there you were that first day telling me how pleased you were to be working with me. . . . You had me fooled all right."

Ware said: "Ah, we follow the rules. Always follow the rules, my dear. But now I've seen you at work. I know now. I'm impressed. And you can let that go to your head. I'd hate to tell you how many plays I've been in and how many so-called actresses I've had to struggle with. If there's any justice, my obituary in *The Times* will be several yards long. But I don't expect they'll list all the plays. No, not by a long chalk; they'll say Kenneth Ware first came to attention in 1910 in a play called *His Second Wife*, etcetera, etcetera, and then his last appearance was in 1900 something in—well, that's your guess.

"But what was I saying? Yes, I know. I was giving you a compliment, my dear. And no woman need ever object to a compliment. . . . It always amazes me that a young woman may be not only very beautiful—as you are, Isobel—very accomplished, graceful and that, but also know how to act. And yet it happens. Fortunately it does happen."

He ordered another drink and turned back to me, this time with an American accent. "Yes, pal, you're damned lucky, you know. In my younger days I'd have made off with Isobel by now. But I'm too old to go through the motions any longer. Haven't even pinched your bottom, my dear, have I?"

"No, you haven't," said Winky with a mocking pout.

"Oversight, pal," he said. "Sheer oversight. I'm beginning to act my age."

These words tickled him. "Having acted everything else I guess I'm entitled to act my age. What say, pal?"

"Right," I said.

"Shake, pal. You're okay. He's okay, isn't he, my dear?"

"Okay," said Winky.

Ware subsided for a little while. His animation dropped from him instantly when he stopped talking, and I noticed how tired his eyes looked. But he came back at us with another spurt of energy :

"Did you know this is my third Croyden play? Becoming a habit, I've got to break it. Anyway—just in the family, you understand—Croyden's on the way out. *Finito*. Yes, pal, like you say, he's *had* it. Adios, mes enfants. Last play—audiences weren't a bit pleased. Gertie said to Mavis, What's it all about, ducks? Even the Wimbledon ladies said, My dear, it's *too* baffling! . . . Dragged on six months or so—reputation—this one about the same, daresay.

"What'll I do next? The sixty-four dollar question, pal. . . . Sixty-four smackers—not much, is it? What? Twenty quid and a bit. I've got that, got plenty. Don't have to act any more. Not a bit of it, pal. Ought to retire—little spot in the country—garden—books. Damnation! . . ."

"Do you have a country place?" I asked.

"Nonsense! All in the head. Like this acting stuff. Never should have been an actor, old pals. 'Twas the mother, she wanted it. Only learned why many years later when the old man decided to tell me all about it. Seventy by then he must have been—frightful old codger—very scrupulous, very methodical. Young man, he says—I was about forty but still young man. Your mother, he says, had an affair with an actor. Before you were born. She always thought you were his son, he says. But it wasn't true. The old man was wizard with numbers. He had calculated—she was all wrong—impossible. But pretty damned close the way he figured it. I was his own son—thought I ought to know before he passed on. . . .

"It was like a sex lecture. Old man insisted on telling me. That's why I had to become actor, remind her of lover. Sad little Victorian story, what? Not so very sad. Proves parents shouldn't choose professions for their children! Should have been politician. Always wanted that. Address the House, maiden speech, Cabinet post. But too much success—too much, too much. Frankie Sinatra of my day—girls used to scream when I turned up. Not quite, though, girls didn't scream those days. . . . What d'you say, old pal?"

"Right," I said.

"Swell—have another gin. No—brandy. Filthy stuff. Here's lookin' at you. . . . Did you know I made a movie with Garbo? Never knew, eh? That'll be in the obituary, too. Silent. Fine woman, excellent woman. Wouldn't want to tangle with her, though. Three years in Hollywood. Big hopes. Big flop. Ha-ha!"

"Were you really in movies?" said Winky.

"Bet your life, dear girl, sure 'nough. Mighty different in those days, mighty different." He was sounding now like a cowhand in a Westerner.

"Lots of money," he went on. "Lots parties. Good when you're young. Yessiree. Act your age. . . . Why don't you two get married? Good for you. Married twice meself, fine women both of them. But things change—all the time. Look round, everything's changed—never the same. What do you say, pal?"

"Exactly," I said.

"Shake, pal. Have another swig."

As he ordered another, Winky said, "Maybe you better take it easy."

He ignored her. "Lovely girl my first wife. Only seventeen she was when I married her. Family never approved—her family. Lasted two years."

"What a shame!" said Winky, smiling.

"Not a bit, old pal, no regrets. She left me flat as a fish so I took me to New York, made lots of money. Best thing

in the world that could have happened. She lived with an Egyptian four years—died of the mumps. Pretty little thing, with lilac-coloured eyes—Arabella Titchen.

"Hell of a life, isn't it? Rather be cosy at home than in Manchester. Who wouldn't? Now you don't see Croyden here, do you? Knows what he's doing, that cove. Poor old Croyden. First met him when he was twenty. Trying to get on the stage. Doesn't like to remember that. Oh no!—not quite the gentleman, Bobby Croyden—no background—no family. Nobody cares about that any more. Bobby, I said to him, keep up with the times—shifting sands and all that. No good, wouldn't ever listen to me. Invited me to keep out of his life. Delighted, Bobby, delighted! We barely talk any more."

He didn't miss Winky's yawn. Momentarily sobered, he said, "Ah, you're tired, my dear. Must get your rest. Up to your room with you."

The waiter said, "Last call."

I realized that, although the bar was closing to the public, Ware would be able to go on drinking as long as he liked. That was the privilege of any resident of the hotel. And I knew that he *would* go on drinking; he had made it sound like a tradition.

"I guess I am tired," said Winky. "It was a long drive."

"Off you go, both of you. I'm only blethering, acting my age. Old man with old stories. Go on, get your sleep. I had mine, *years* ago. . . . Don't forget rehearsal at ten tomorrow." He tried to rise with a great effort, but succeeded only in knocking over his glass and the water-pitcher. They made a great crash when they landed, but Ware didn't seem to notice. He finally remained seated, looking rather stiff.

After I had taken care of the waiter, Ware said, "Shake, pal," and we shook hands. Winky kissed him on the cheek.

The performance next evening didn't quite satisfy anyone. At first it surprised me that any of the cast should suffer from

nerves ; then I realized it would have been foolish not to expect that. For the first time, after their weeks of working, as it seemed to me, in a private vacuum, they were face to face with a theatre full of strangers : the audience. For the first time, they had to attune themselves to accidents, unexpected laughter, unexpected silences. Like the cast, I was aware of everything the audience did : a loud cough that buried an important line, people coming to their seats late, fussing with the ushers in the aisle. Everything that happened this side of the footlights had to operate as a distraction on the other side. It all required a new kind of adaptation in the actors, an adaptation that could not possibly have been made, or even taken into account during rehearsals.

Kenneth Ware was, naturally, the least troubled. He showed no trace of his binge and, as always, he simply went about his business, as considerate of his audience as he would have been of guests he had invited to visit him, and certainly not thrown off by them. I had the impression that he helped Winky considerably. She started out with altogether too much tension. The character she was playing appeared wrought up, which was not her plan at all. Ware, during his first scene with her, slowed her down, paused long enough to make her realize what she was doing wrong. What went on between them appeared to me like a kind of sociability. It was as if they were at a cocktail party and Ware was saying to her, under his breath : " Tut, tut, my dear, you may have had an appalling afternoon but you must buck up, you don't want all these people to *know*."

It worked beautifully. I was aware of the very moment when she relaxed. From then on I felt sure of her. If anyone got through to the audience that evening, it was Winky. But I didn't think that very much did get through. The audience went flat half-way through the performance ; their excitement was simply punctured and oozed away slowly but steadily. In spite of all Tunnel's deft disguises, the play itself set up a thick barrier, and all the sympathy in

the world couldn't quite penetrate it. I would have summed it up as a 'cold' evening, without any thrill or even a good healthy bewilderment. It just didn't mean *enough*.

The surprise of the evening for me was the appearance of Marianne in the lobby during the first intermission. She was with Basking and this time she had to introduce us. I hadn't noticed the first time that he wore glasses.

They'd driven up at the last minute, she said. "I thought it wouldn't be right for the Croydens to be unrepresented. David was all for coming, too."

"Good idea," I said.

"But what on earth are *you* doing here?" she asked pointedly. "I never dreamt you were as devoted to Daddy as all that."

Rather weakly I said: "It is sort of an event, isn't it?"

Marianne laughed. "You're not being quite honest with me. D'you think word doesn't get around? I've been hearing a thing or two about you. Must say you surprise me."

"Why?"

"I didn't think it was quite your style. But then one never knows, does one?"

Though I knew of course what she was talking about, I couldn't quite grasp the reason for her stating it in just this way. Unless it was simply the way women have of taunting a man they think has 'fallen' for another woman, any other woman. Unable to say quite straightforwardly, Someone told me about you and Miss X, they resort to an attack in double-talk, against which there is practically no defence.

The only answer I thought Marianne deserved I lacked the bravura to give her, so I compromised by saying: "Maybe you want to know too much." Even that had to be thrown away with a smile, to show that we were both operating within the rules of civilized chatter—and both knew it.

She saved us all by laughing again. "Oh never! The

unquenchable thirst for knowledge and all that. . . . How do you think it's going?" she asked.

"The play? Fine, I think."

"Really? I wondered whether Frank hadn't been just a little too creative once or twice. Well, we'll see."

During the second intermission, Marianne apparently stayed in her seat. I saw Basking alone at the bar. I didn't expect him to speak to me, but he came straight towards me with his glass in his hand, saying: "Marianne tells me you work in the American Embassy. I must remember you, you might be able to help me one day. Problems always cropping up."

"Yes, of course," I said.

"I've often thought of visiting your country but there are all these damned currency restrictions. Still—I suppose we'll have Labour out fairly soon and get everything back to normal again."

"I suppose," I said.

In spite of the fact that he had made two of the statements I could expect to hear from almost any Englishman I met, Basking was one of those people who are immediately engaging—probably through a very little fault of their own. These people are favoured with good looks, a general liking for their fellow humans, and an easy tolerance of social conventions. This does not rule out the possibility of their being ill-tempered, stingy, concupiscent, envious, or anything else equally unattractive. All that their endowments mean is that they will always make a good first impression—as Basking made on me. He took to me without fuss, had neither avoided me nor sought me out. He simply behaved as if it were naturally more pleasant to spend an intermission at the theatre speaking to someone, than standing by oneself and trying to look amused or intelligent—or just tall. I agreed with him.

"Frankly," he said to me in a lowered voice, "I can't say I'm very intrigued by this play. Are you?"

I confessed that I wasn't.

"Never have understood the Croyden magic myself," he continued. "But then I'm full of blind spots. Barrie was another. But the truth of the matter is that I'm not frightfully keen on the English stage even at its best. It's the French style I like. There's acting for you! Nothing like it—in a Racine play, silly as they may be, when some actress or other steps up to the lights and takes over the stage. Electrifying, that's what it is. There's your magic. You watch a French audience some time when that happens. Completely mesmerized—like a bullfight. You'll never find that in an English theatre, at least I never have."

"Maybe it's a greater taste for realism—the American theatre's that way too," I said.

"Oh, yes, I grant you it is that, but I can't say I care much for realism, in any art. Enough realism in the street, don't you think? The theatre should be an experience, an art. . . ." He laughed disarmingly and almost a little shyly. "It's not like me to go on this way. Don't let me frighten you."

"Not a bit," I said.

"No, but as a matter of fact this American girl's awfully interesting, I find. Bit rough round the edges maybe but *she* could develop a style. The way she spoke back to her mother, jolly good that."

I was pleased that he had noticed that, because I felt that Winky had become fully relaxed at precisely that point. Yes, he was decidedly a perceptive young man. I was glad I had started out by liking him.

"That was *The Times* man just went out," he said, but I had missed seeing the person he meant. "Looked a bit worried to me. Of course you never know—might just have been his dinner, or getting his crit done to-night. Still . . . I wonder how Croyden would take it if the play failed. Hate to see that, jolly decent old fellow. D'you know him?"

"Oh, I've met him a couple of times," I said.

"Man of great refinement, don't you think? My own

father was a rather crude man, not an idea in his bean. I've always admired a brainy chap. Family always thought I took books and the arts too seriously. They were terrified I'd do too well at Cambridge. Well, I didn't. Protected the family honour and satisfied them completely, I'm sorry to say."

The last act seemed to lack an end. I hoped the rest of the audience were not as restless as I was. I was glad to hear Beryl Jamison fling out her troublesome line—minus 'gracious'—with the greatest composure. But the only moment of real theatre came at the very end, and it was all Winky's. The script made a rather telling point—that the rich American girl, having secured her English husband, was probably destined for unhappiness all the same. But what Winky managed to suggest—for the first time since I'd watched her—was that the girl herself suddenly realized this. It was amazingly pathetic, and was achieved almost invisibly, with nothing more than a peculiar way Winky tugged at her belt with her fingers. I don't think anyone watching it could have analysed it, but the impression she created suddenly caught the audience, gave them a momentary focus, and when the curtain came down I think they all felt that they'd had a better time and a more absorbing experience than was true.

There was nothing approaching an ovation, but there was no booing either. One embarrassing woman in the fifth row of the stalls, apparently an intransigent Croyden fan, rose and cried, 'Author!' But there was no author to appear. She was prevailed upon to sit down again after a short struggle, but I watched her scanning the boxes and stalls for a glimpse of Croyden. I wondered if she'd ever actually seen him.

Marianne caught up with me as I trudged up the aisle.

"Are you going backstage?" she asked.

"Yes, I thought I would."

"Well, come along then. There's a door down here. . . .

Oh, we also wondered if you wanted a lift back to-night ? We're driving directly up to London."

"No, thank you, Marianne. I've got my car."

"Right-o. By the way, I'm off to Rapallo to-morrow. Want to join me ?" And she laughed as she led the way.

I wouldn't attribute the word 'exhilarated' to the atmosphere backstage. Everyone seemed simply relieved that it was over, out in the open, as it were. The culture hounds of Manchester were back there, either standing about admiringly or pushing their way into dressing-rooms. Winky was fairly well inundated in the room she shared with Jamison, so I stayed outside. Marianne made straight for Kenneth Ware ; I could hear her voice, high-pitched and spirited, exclaiming enthusiastically. It all sounded forced.

Basking stood inside the set while stage-hands, rushing to get home, picked things up around him. He seemed quite unperturbed by them and appeared as much at his ease there as Ware had been during the performance. I wondered whether he was standing there to get the mysterious *feel* of the stage.

The crush thinned after a while. Marianne caught sight of me and asked whether I'd seen Basking. I pointed to the stage. She called out to him and he turned towards her with his smile. As he walked to her, I was watching her face. I had no doubt then that she was in love with him.

"Goddam it, you might at least be truthful !" Winky shouted at me so loudly that everyone in the bar turned around. Under her breath she told them all to go to hell.

"Baby," I said evenly and softly, "that's just what I'm doing."

"You're not, you're coddling me ! Everything was wrong. I didn't know what I was doing. No attack, no timing, no—no coherence. That's what bothered me. Line after line after line, and nothing *built* !"

"Listen, you're just trying to punish yourself for something that's not your fault. I told you you looked tense at first and then I thought Ware slowed you down. That showed in the scene with your mother. Even Basking saw that——"

"Who's Basking?" she asked.

"Friend of Marianne's——"

"And that fish face! 'Thought you were very sweet, my dear,' she says to me. Goddam it, I wasn't supposed to be sweet!"

"But she didn't know what to say. You know that. Like that girl that ran up to us that day——"

"Oh, yes, I know. Fish-face is an old flame of yours. Mustn't say anything nasty about her."

"Please——"

She looked at me and the expression on her face changed. "Okay, honey. I didn't mean it. I love you anyway. . . . Tell me some more. Go on."

I said: "What you did at the end was marvellous."

"What did I do?"

"I mean the way you suggested that Peggy herself knew she wouldn't be happy."

She started to laugh. "Did I suggest that?"

"To me you did. Didn't you mean to?"

Now she couldn't stop laughing. She threw back her head and gave way to it. Eventually she was able to splutter: "Is that how it looked? That's good, that's damned good!"

"What do you mean?"

She had to talk through her laughter, and again she attracted the stern attention of the other people sitting in the bar. "You know what I was thinking at the end? I suddenly decided I would call you Bunny."

"Oh God, no!"

"Why not? Do you know the way you move your nose——"

"No, I'll never take Bunny."

" But it's *you*, baby. It's you all over, you haven't got any choice."

" Not Bunny."

I kept on protesting aimlessly until we were both laughing and fairly hysterical.

§ Nine §

IT surprised us to find how inconclusive, or timid, or evasive the reviews were. A sense of disappointment did seep through ; but, on the whole, though these anonymous writers generally gave the impression that this might not be top-drawer Croyden, they ended up by being vaguely favourable to both the play and the production. I didn't see how they could earnestly discuss the *ideas* of the play, but they did—as if Croyden were as significant as Shaw. It looked as if the Croyden magic, as Basking had called it, had a tenuous chance of holding.

The best thing about the reviews, however, was the attention they gave to Winky. Without exception it was her performance that they spotlighted, with the same kind of delighted praise and sense of discovery that she had received in the States. It was as if nobody expected her to be as good as she finally was. Certainly that had been true in my case.

All the anxiety she had felt after the performance was dispelled next morning. Over breakfast she was all smiles. It very nearly embarrassed her to be so highly praised ; but the embarrassment was a great deal easier for her to bear than the chagrin she would have felt if the critics had ignored or dismissed her. On the basis of the reviews, she knew that she *would* be able to give a brilliant performance of the part, even though she recognized that she hadn't yet done so.

I was able to leave her in the best possible state of mind. It was as if her ordeal was over and she, at least, was assured of a personal success. I wondered how long it would be now before I should become unnecessary.

The flat seemed more than just empty when I got back to London. It was *deprived* of Winky, somehow more hollow and uninhabited than it would have been even if all the furniture had been removed. I felt myself at loose ends.

We telephoned to each other from time to time, during that week she was in Manchester, and the next week when the play was being shown in Newcastle. We made plans for me to fly up to Edinburgh in three weeks when the play moved on there ; but it was a lonely, anchorless time for me. I watched August come in, sunny and warm (for London) ; I worked, had dinner with various of my married friends, read without much interest or application. My secretary's tour of duty ended just then and she was replaced from Washington by a frightful middle-aged shrew, who complained about the disorder of my files, complained about the furniture in her office, complained about London, complained, complained . . .

Americans came through London on their way to the Edinburgh Festival, where it was sure to rain. The Pleasure Gardens in Battersea were filled, each dry night, with noisy, seedy-looking young people who ate ices or jellied cels or dried-out sandwiches. Girls screamed from the roller coaster and even on the merry-go-round, just for the sake of screaming. Everywhere people queued up. Occasionally tall, slim fashionable men wearing bowlers walked across the river from Chelsea to see 'the people' at play. I suppose that's what I was doing too. The English girls were singularly unflirtatious. They giggled and chattered among themselves, but there was hardly a suggestive glance among the lot.

My longings were all for another climate, another race. Again it was the South. I remembered Rome, even in poor weather as it had been in June, I remembered France ; and

the difference between all that and London made me long for a change. I missed the colours of the South : the hot breathless pinks, the rich creams and tans, the blues—greyed by haze, or clear and whitened, or even vulgarly primary.

I finally went to Paris in the middle of August. When I spoke to Winky over the phone the night before I went, she said I was a pig to leave her. I didn't take her very seriously, though, and the minute I was on the plane, and especially when I saw the floor of the Channel below me, I felt a sense of complete relief.

I did know that August was closed season in Paris, but I hadn't ever myself been there in that month and wasn't prepared for the extent to which Parisians actually shut up shop. Most of my favourite restaurants were closed. Only a handful of the hardiest theatres were still functioning, doggedly and wearily. They might just as well have gone on vacation too. In the evenings the main thoroughfares were probably not less crowded than usual, but the people I saw seemed to me singularly unattractive : they had the look of left-overs. If I had missed the atmosphere of flirtation in London, it was certainly there in the open in Paris. But it was lurid and brazen, lacking any charm.

—I felt, that first evening, the overheated gritty disillusionment that occasionally drifts down over Paris.

For some reason that I didn't explain to myself, I waited until the second day to call Lucy. That turned out to be an unfortunate mistake. The first time I placed the call—about eleven in the morning—there was no answer. When I tried again in the afternoon, it was Nordale who answered. He understood very quickly who I was, but told me that Lucy had left the evening before for the south.

That news certainly disconcerted me. All at once there seemed to be no reason for my having come. That wasn't true, of course ; I had come primarily because of my restlessness in London. But, in that first moment of disappointment, I couldn't remember that. I felt as if I had been stood up.

Nordale could obviously hear my deflation over the phone. It was too bad, he said ; he knew Lucy would have wanted to see me. She too would be disappointed.

He asked whether I would have a drink with him, right then, in half an hour. For only a moment I hesitated. He was still, as far as I was concerned, such an unknown factor that I didn't automatically know whether or not I wanted to see him alone. But I said yes, and he specified a café on the Rond-Point which would be more or less along the way to the place he had to go afterward.

I was already seated at the café when he arrived. When I had recognized him and we had shaken hands, I took a hew look at him. The first time we had met, he had not been a person I needed to examine very deeply. But now, the situation being so changed, I wanted to know him very well indeed. I wanted, in fact, more than any external scrutiny could possibly afford me. But that's the only place we can start with new people : there often is a need to judge a book by its cover.

While he tried to find a suitable and safe place for the large flat package he was carrying (it looked as if it might be a painting), I wondered if Lucy considered him good-looking. He certainly looked anything but French, with his light hair and fair skin. His face was lean and very sparsely bearded ; he had a very young look about the mouth, but his eyes, rather large and deep-set, corrected that impression. They had the dark orange-brown richness of agate, and yet they were sombre. When he smiled and narrowed his eyes, they had a glow which, curiously, made him seem both kind and wise.

I decided he must be at least forty.

He started by repeating what he'd said over the phone about Lucy. It was obvious they had talked to each other about me ; he knew about Rome but not, I suspected, what role I had played there. His whole approach to me suggested that he would permit me to become the family friend, if that was

what I wanted to be. He left it, in a way, up to me ; and I wasn't aware of any nuances that went farther than that.

"It's I who persuaded Lucy to go," he explained to me, with his curious American accent. "She didn't want to go very much but I really thought it would do her good."

"And she only left yesterday ?" I said.

"Yes—it is too bad."

We both ordered vermouth. There were two girls not far from us whom I took to be Italians. One of them had a habit of bringing her hand up to her forehead to sweep her long hair, black with purplish glints, back from her eyes. They both used cigarette-holders.

"Have you known Lucy a very long time ?" Nordale asked me.

"Not at all," I said. And laughing I added : "I met her just the day before you did—"

"Oh, at the Brunots'. Is that so ? Somehow I had the idea you knew her longer than that."

"No." I shook my head. "Has she mentioned Marianne Croyden to you ? Because it was Marianne who knew Lucy some years ago—and then I met Lucy through *her*."

"Oh, I see." He rubbed his chin and nodded.

Then he changed the subject : "You live in London now, don't you ? I recently have been approached for an exposition there."

"Very nice !"

"Yes, I think so," he said, not very forcefully. "I have one very kind critic there who has been trying to prepare a showing. Do you know Widgeff by any chance—Victor Widgeff ?"

"Oh, yes—of course. But don't you remember, he was at the Brunots' that day, too. He came with Lucy and me."

"Ah, now I remember—yes ! He spoke to me then, a very tall man——"

"Yes, that's right," I said.

"It is amusing. He wrote to me only last week with this

suggestion. And now I have heard from the gallery. They are very enthusiastic, very pressing. I think, perhaps, I will show there."

I asked if it would be the first time.

"The first time a one-man show, yes," he said. "I have shown pictures in London, before, of course, what they call representative shows. New artists, group shows, but never a whole show of my own."

I wondered why Victor hadn't mentioned this to me. Perhaps it had all developed since I'd seen him. Perhaps he'd simply forgotten.

"It is strange," said Nordalc, "these shows. I know what the critics will say, that I am in a new phase which cannot yet be assessed, or my recent work shows a slight decline from my earlier promise, or I am taking some ideas from Dufy or Rouault—it doesn't matter whom. You see, I even know the phrases they use. And then if the show fails the gallery owners are no longer interested. Naturally. But if there is too much success then they become a nuisance, they want another show immediately, they want you to paint for *them*. It is only business to them after all, even if they say it is all their love of art. Oh, it is very much business! They want to make you like a *vedette*, a cinema star—parties and interviews and statements and all kinds of publicity. It is very unpleasant."

But he laughed, as if to indicate that it was a problem he knew how to deal with in his own way.

"Is it simpler here?" I asked.

"Somewhat. One can remain freer here if one stays out of the world of fashion—I mean to say society, of course."

"And do you?"

He grinned. "There are temptations. Right now I would like to have more money. Lucy, she is used to a different kind of life. I don't want her to be unhappy because we are poor."

"Do you think she would be? Unhappy, I mean."

He didn't reply at once. Maybe there was no spontaneous answer to that question.

After a minute, though, he said : " Lucy is very young, you know. Sometimes she is—should I say nervous ? Our life here is not what she is accustomed to. At first I believe that was amusing to her, everyone is amused by a change. . . . "

" Yes."

" But then no longer is it a change. It is your life and one may become dissatisfied from time to time. Don't you think it is so ? "

" Yes, of course," I said, suddenly feeling that there might be more to our conversation than a simple exchange of pleasantries. " But I'm a little surprised to hear you call Lucy nervous. I would have thought that was the *last* word for her."

He leaned forward, a shade of greater intensity in his expression. " Perhaps I use the word wrong," he said. " I do not say the word unhappy because I do not want to believe Lucy can be unhappy in so short a time, you see. But always between two people there are disputes, each one is used to different ways, each one is anxious at first to keep to his old habits. Lucy is perhaps too young to know this. Sometimes she is worried because I want things so and she wants things another way. She is not accustomed to Paris and that is something that worries her, too."

" Yes, I can see that," I said.

" That is why I wanted her to go away for a little while. She has been trying, perhaps, too hard. We both want very much to please each other——"

" I know."

" But it is not right to be dishonest in any way. We must both find our way together, you understand. And we cannot expect everything to be easy. . . . "

" And yet," I said, " I suppose Lucy is used to finding everything easy. She hasn't had what you'd call a hard life."

He looked at me sympathetically ; I felt more than ever

invited to be his friend. "Yes," he said, "it is probably more easy for you to understand. . . . People can always get along, I am certain of that, if they are two normal and rational people, but when there is love . . . Well, it is a strange thing but love makes everything a little more difficult."

His manner, as he said this, made me feel sad. He too seemed to participate in the current disillusionment of Paris. It was like a seasonal fever; one of those 'bugs' that goes the rounds. And was Lucy, far away from us now, also infected? There was no doubting it.

Certain formulæ came to my mind: Love is a series of progressive disillusionments. Reality is the enemy of love. Love is the great Complicator.

But, even as I had these thoughts, I recognized them for the catch-phrases and pat paradoxes that they were. They might please the literary mind, because they were like tiny capsules charged with explosive implications. But the emotions are anything but neat. They're more likely to be elusive, messy, and infinitely variable—of all human phenomena, the least likely to keep to formula.

Nordale sat back and said: "I tell you, it is Mme. Brunot I am going to see now. She may buy a painting. Why don't you come with me?"

"Do you think it would be all right?"

"I am sure she would be glad, but I can telephone. Wait here a minute, I will speak to her."

While he was gone, I observed the Italian girls. They had been joined by another, who was apparently showing something she had just bought. All three of them were extremely handsome—on the large and solid side. Each was a slightly different shade of tan. Their brown toes were bare in leather sandals; and one of the girls had finger-nails that were long and curved like talons, glistening red. All three of them seemed to have been created for summer: for bare arms and legs, for colour.

They at least had not yet caught the sadness of Paris in that August afternoon.

Nor had Mme Brunot. Either she was immune or knew a secret specific against despair. She was full of the vitality I remembered as she drew us into that out-dated salon. Now that it was empty, with its shutters drawn against the sun and heat, and no voices were competing with one another there, it seemed a desolate and deserted place.

In French, Mme Brunot said, "I am so glad that Daniel brought you along ! I have been alone here all day, simply perishing for company." With an extraordinary understanding of herself, she added ; "I am nobody without company !"

"You never do yourself justice," said Nordalc. Then, I think because he was afraid this might appear to me like abject flattery, he laughed.

"Oh, sometimes," she said, "sometimes when I am entirely alone and there are no ghosts to catch me at it, I say very nice things to myself. Aurélie, I tell myself, you look exceptionally pretty to-night, very young, very slender, very small, very graceful. That dark young man at the butcher shop couldn't keep his eyes off you. If he hadn't been working he'd have followed you home . . ."

Turning to me she explained : "You see, I keep in my room a set of those trick mirrors they have at fairs. You know them ? They make you look entirely different, they are so sympathetic and understanding."

"What a wonderful idea !" said Nordalc.

"You think so, dear friend ? Oh, you see what a clever little soul you are, Aurélie ! Even Daniel agrees."

I felt in very safe and practised hands with her. If she didn't actually have trick mirrors in her private rooms, she certainly had plenty of tricks in public. She had, above all, a sense of play : it was the electricity I had felt around her that first time.

She wanted to see the painting right away. Nordalc had

promised her a look at it a long time ago. And, what was more, it was to be a *first* look : no one else had ever seen it. What other reason would there be for her to remain in Paris during this sweltering weather that was worse than Equatorial Africa ?

Nordale unwrapped the picture with great care, making a ball of the cord, and neatly folding the brown paper as if for future use. Then he set the picture down on the arms of a chair about three feet away from us.

I couldn't quite grasp it at once. It seemed to be a seascape ; there was a sandy beach and water—or so it appeared. And on the beach stood a fantastic ship, shining, meticulously and luminously painted, with a multitude of tiny sails rising into an illusion of tremendous height. On the left-hand side, near the upper corner, was a vague pale face that seemed almost to disappear as I stared at it.

The whole thing gave the impression, at first, of a disappointingly banal ocean scene ; at least many of the elements were there. But the fact that the ship was not on the water itself very quickly set the scene askew. In fact it stopped being a scene at all and became a composition, with an abstract structure. The longer I looked at it the more I felt sure that this was what Nordale had intended. The sea and beach were very simply suggested, and the face was like nothing more than a dream ; it was only the ship that had polished, finicky details.

For me, personally, the picture had a great deal of interest, although it didn't overwhelm me with pleasure. I couldn't place it anywhere among the phases I understood of contemporary painting. As fantasy, it had nothing in common with Ensor or Chagall, or even the insect intricacies of Klee. It was not what I could conceive of as pure abstract—nor was it surrealist in its intent or in its feeling. Victor had spoken about the very personal quality of Nordale's work.

I saw now something of what he meant : Nordale, if one could judge from this one painting, was not to be pinned

down, he resisted a comfortable existence among the recognized categories. His art was destined to be troubling.

"Now let us see!" said Mme Brunot. She too, I believe, went through a gradual appreciation of the picture. It was enlightening to watch how she took her leisure, absorbing it in tiny well-considered portions, like a connoisseur tasting wine. After a minute she stood up, to get at the picture from another angle. She stood right in front of it to examine its technique and texture; and then withdrew to see it from far away. At no time did she look puzzled; on the contrary, she had the air of knowing all about it.

"The colours please me very much," she said simply. "I see you are not leaning so heavily on that red any more. That's good."

Nordale said: "You see, sometimes I do take your advice."

"Not often enough. But tell me—the ship, why does she sit on the sand? From the way you spoke about it I thought you meant to have her floating in air?"

"Never."

"Ah, I misunderstood then. No matter." Again she concentrated on the picture. Her very seriousness enhanced its dignity. She didn't seem to me the kind of woman who would sham in any context that she took seriously.

"You will leave it with me, won't you?"

"But, of course," said Nordale. "I don't expect you to decide in ten minutes."

"My dear Daniel, you know you'll be lucky if I make up my mind in ten *weeks*! But I have a feeling I probably shall not buy it, you know. It is not beautiful enough for me. You know how old-fashioned I am."

Impulsively I said: "If Mme Brunot doesn't buy it, I will."

That captured her fancy. Clapping her hands, she cried: "Oh, Daniel, you were wise to bring our young friend. I see how sly you were. If he becomes *too* interested in it then, of course, I'll have to have it."

Nordale laughed and spread open his arms. "Well, I have nothing to lose in any case," he said.

"But I'm serious," I said, afraid that they were in some vague private way laughing at me.

"But right now it will stay here for me to decide," said Mme Brunot, "so you will have to be patient."

"I shall be most patient."

"Good. Don't forget Daniel has other paintings you could buy. . . . And now we should have something to drink, or should I order tea in honour of you?" She meant me.

I didn't understand for a moment. "Oh—you must think I'm British. I'm American."

"Oh?" She turned to Nordale for help. "But surely there was an Englishman that time?"

"Yes," I said, "but that was someone else—Victor Widdett."

"Oh, I am so sorry. One does so hate not to be recognized. But you forgive me, don't you?"

Nordale interrupted: "Aurélié, I won't be able to stay——"

"Not stay?" She sat down and pouted. "You would leave me here all alone, with Léon in Brussels and everyone else in the world gone? In *August*?" She made it sound as if his desertion of her in any other season would be forgivable.

"But I had no idea. I really am engaged for dinner——"
She laughed. "But don't look so unhappy! I won't whip you. You know you must never take me too seriously. All I hope for you is that your dinner companion will be as young and lovely as Aurélié—in her trick mirrors, of course. If so I shall not mind, Daniel. I will only make hints to Lucy when she comes back."

Nordale said gravely: "Lucy never need worry about me."

"How fortunate she is!" cried Mme Brunot. "But maybe our young American will stay with me. The dinner is already ordered and being cooked, and I am not the slightest bit ashamed of my cuisine. You *will* stay?"

"With great pleasure," I said. "In fact you'll save my life. I have nothing at all to do to-night."

"To save a life so easily I would invite all Paris to dine to-night !"

So it seemed to arrange itself. Nordale withdrew with the utmost grace, kissing Mme Brunot's hand, and telling me to telephone him the next day.

We came back into the salon and Mme Brunot accepted a cigarette from me. I had not seen her smoke before.

The painting still sat where Nordale had placed it. She scrutinized it again while she smoked but didn't make any comment on it. Instead she asked whether I had ever heard of Nordale in America.

As I had not, she said : "I would like to do something for him there. Maybe when I go to New York next year. . . . Oh, I do miss New York. It is so exciting ! And the radio—how I love those wonderful stories in the afternoons—and the advertising. It is so clever. I miss them very much !"

"Did you really listen to them ?" I asked, since she had already said she was not to be taken too seriously.

"Oh, invariably ! From three to five o'clock every afternoon. Now I have nothing to do here in the afternoon. I wonder what has happened to that adorable Mary Noble and her husband, and that woman, Stella Dallas, isn't that her name ?—Oh, you must not laugh at me ! You Americans cannot appreciate it as I do. That opportunity to enter into other people's lives, every day of the year——"

"Except week-ends."

"Yes, except week-ends." She suddenly roused herself. "But we haven't had our drink ! You will think me very much out of practice as a hostess." She rang for the maid.

"But tell me," she went on, "why are you in Paris now, of all times ?"

"I don't really know," I said. "London seemed to me so unpleasant the other day, I just told myself I'd have to go somewhere else."

"But Paris, too, is unpleasant."

I had to agree. "But I also hoped Lucy would be here. It was very disappointing to find she was gone."

She nodded her head thoughtfully, as if she now shared my disappointment. "Oh yes, Lucy . . . She is a very old friend of yours?"

"No," I said. "Everyone asks that. I really know her very little."

"But she interests you?"

I hesitated, for no reason at all except that it was such a direct question. There is apt to be so much misunderstanding among people when personal feelings are concerned, that I am inclined, when asked about my own feelings, to qualify, to specify, to say anything rather than yes or no. And yet I finally said, "Yes," to Mme Brunot, though I think I managed to convey that it was perhaps less simple than that.

"In what way?" she went on inexorably.

"Well—it's hard for me to say something like that precisely. I find her an attractive person, I'm interested in the kind of girl she is. Let's say I love youth."

"Why do you smile?" she said. "It doesn't surprise me. . . . But do you find Lucy unusual?"

"No, it's not that." And, wondering whether considerations of discretion should keep me from going on, I added: "I'm intrigued by this business with Nordale."

This sparked a special gleam of interest in her, though she went on as if to minimize it. "Oh that! It is a great problem but it will be all right, I suppose."

The maid interrupted us there, and I was afraid this would make us lose the subject. I persisted when we were alone again: "About Lucy—why did you say it was a problem?"

"But that must be apparent," she said with surprise.

I shrugged my shoulders. "I don't see——"

"What kind of life can it be for Lucy? She's not meant to be a little housewife. It's not for her."

I thought she was quite wrong. I could easily see Lucy

in a gleaming kitchen with her refrigerator and freezer and dish-washing machine, looking cool and efficient, like the women in glossy advertisements. That, at least, was the American view of things. I said: "But if they marry——"

"Marry!" she shouted. "But don't you know? Lucy didn't tell you?"

It was very curious how all at once I became aware of the room again. Afterwards, I felt as if the remark she was going to make (and I knew then what it was, of course, before she actually said it) required for itself a background. Or maybe it was simply that I couldn't look at her just then. All I know is that the room came back—quite suddenly—into my consciousness, with its funny gross chairs and the pictures and the shuttered windows.

"I suppose very few people do know," she was saying, "but he has been married. Quite a long time ago. I'm very glad to say I don't know the woman—she lives in North Africa now."

"But I thought——" I don't know what I intended to say. In a way, I expect, I wanted to deny the fact. Wanted to say, You must be wrong, Victor Widdgett told me he's not married. I wanted, irrationally, to say something even more convincing than that, or to produce a document that would prove her mistaken.

"They would have been divorced years ago but his mother . . ."

That modern old woman I'd spoken to? The one who didn't look her age, who tried martinis, who had seemed to me so urbane and worldly and—well, wasn't modern the best word?

"If you're a Catholic you will understand," Mme Brunot said. "If you're not, you won't. I am not a Catholic, I am a Jew, so I don't understand."

"But Lucy, she *did* know, didn't she?"

"Oh, yes—Daniel is not dishonest. In fact I find him a very extraordinary man. Yes, he told her."

"And didn't she come to you for advice? It seems to me she wrote that she'd talked to you about it."

"Yes—she talked to me, but after they were already in that apartment; it was not as if anything could be done about it then. Too often—have you noticed?—there are these situations in which one must simply make the best of things. That was the only advice I could give Lucy by then. Oh, our little Lucy has cried several times in this very room. And I like her so much. On the ship when I first met her—oh, you can imagine how gay she was, without a single concern in the world. Like a beautiful insect, a moth. But that fools one, doesn't it? It looks like a kind of insuperable strength but——"

"That's how she always seemed to me," I said, "and yet I always thought her vulnerable, too."

"Ah—you saw more than I!"

I waited a moment before asking what the situation was now. Mme Brunot did not answer at once; she poured another drink for me and got herself a second cigarette. Though she was talking about a situation she must have found as unpleasant and sad as I did, she managed to maintain her wonderful hostess sheen. Above all, her manner suggested she felt it her primary responsibility to keep me, her guest, entertained. She was exuberant, made her typical large gestures; but it was not as if her repertory were inexhaustible. When she told me that Lucy had cried, she moved her hands very much as she would have moved them if she'd been telling me an amusing little anecdote about herself. The result of this was slightly grotesque and distracting, even though I understood it. It meant that I had to wait until late that night, when I was alone in my hotel room, to take full stock of Lucy's predicament.

"The situation at present"—she laughed—"it's not easy for me to say. Lucy was getting into a very bad state. They have been quarrelling, oh, about things very unimportant to you or me. But with people in love—there is

no explaining. . . . Daniel is a little frightened, I think, he does not want to lose her. It is curious how much she means to him, how much he loves her. I have known him for many years, I have seen him with women and I know how he is. This is something I haven't seen before, I assure you. And yet Lucy cannot believe it. When she speaks to me I can see that she has no faith in him. It is not good ; he feels it, it makes him despair.

"And what is so strange to me, is that she too loves him—incredibly. But she's too young, it's something that is too much for her. All she would need is to understand how he loves, for every man loves in his own way. But she's incapable. Even I am unable to convince her. And besides—I tell myself, You must not interfere, Aurélie. You understand, I would like to be a mother to her, but I am not."

"What about her parents ?" I asked.

Her hands came up to show that here was something else again. "Oh, she is worried to death about them. Soon she is meant to be home again and she doesn't know what to write, what excuse to make."

"I'm very sorry about all this. I don't like to think that Lucy suffers. . . . There is no way to move Mme Nordale ?"

"His mother ? None at all, I swear to you. She will not even recognize that Lucy exists. I say it that way because it is that way : like a country that is not recognized by the rest of the world. What she does is to demand more and more time from him. Where do you suppose he was going this evening ? To his mother—I know it. And as for the divorce—one feels it would take dynamite. Yet I cannot help telling myself that if Lucy would demand it of Daniel he might do it, but Lucy won't. I didn't want to go too far with her on that subject ; it would be too great a responsibility. Maybe they will only have a year together, maybe more ; you have to take these things as they come. But I asked a few questions and it is clear to me she wants

absolutely to leave the divorce problem to him. It is like a *test*. All I said to her was that people in love must have no need to test each other, but she would not believe me.

"It is the best thing that she has gone to Antibes now. I have a strong belief in the sun, it makes everything clearer, to the mind as well as the eye. She will come back refreshed, it will be better."

As for myself, I didn't share her faith in the sun. Nor did I set much store in the 'change-of-scene' cure for emotional problems; for these, it struck me, could be carried with one as easily as a tube of toothpaste. In fact, more easily: they took up less room and it was impossible to forget them or leave them behind in a last-minute rush. If Lucy had left Paris unhappy, the sun would not make her happier. And if it was true that she loved Nordale so much, then her absence from him was hardly going to heal her.

I had already seen Lucy—in Rome—worried about uncertainty. I was not satisfied that she could handle it herself; she seemed to me, just then, much less hardy and resilient than even Mme Brunot.

But all the while Mme Brunot must have been feeling uneasily that Lucy was not a proper topic for us; I noticed how she lighted on her optimistic conclusion as a device for shifting our attention. She asked me if I knew the Riviera, she spoke in general of the vacation problem: the impossibility of avoiding all the same people one saw in Paris, her distaste for beaches and salt water, mosquitoes, sunburn, poor hotels . . .

And, still steering us deliberately through safe, sociable subjects, she led me into dinner.

I told myself, as we sat together in a long grey dining-room, at a table of straw-coloured wood, that it was a rare pleasure to be alone with Mme Brunot, who was so obviously attuned to handling groups of people, even crowds. Not that she appeared ill-at-ease in such narrow company as a *tête-à-tête*. It was just that her manner seemed to include

other people who were not there. Her eyes ranged around the table, as if from habit ; her smiles, frowns, pouts and growls were on the grand scale, and she couldn't cut them down for close-up.

It was her suggestion, after dinner, that we should go out on the Champs-Élysées for a liqueur. I remembered, once the taxi deposited us there, what Victor had said about it, and asked Mme Brunot whether she agreed with his conviction.

"What is ever the use of wondering how things used to be?" she said, shrugging her shoulders. "It is here *now* to be enjoyed. That is enough for me."

We had not been sitting very long when a strolling couple stopped suddenly at our table and recognized Mme Brunot. We were delighted to have their company. They sat down and began the kind of chatter that always takes place at cafés. They explained at length how they happened to be there, where they'd had dinner, whom they'd seen. Mme Brunot countered by telling about *her* dinner, and her suggestion that she and I should come out.

Then the other woman went back again and told how she had said to her husband after dinner, "Why don't we take a stroll on the Champs, knowing there wouldn't be a soul there. And, of course, she couldn't believe her eyes when she had seen Aurélie."

The husband said it was strange how one never met one's friends in the Champs any more. They themselves tended to frequent a café in the Place d'Alma whenever they felt the urge to come out now of a rare evening.

Wasn't that true? said Mme Brunot. She had been saying to Léon the other night. . . .

I gazed among the other tables as they went through much of it again—like a rehearsal. It struck me as typical of Paris—uniquely characteristic—that I should see again the tall Italian girl with long red fingernails. Catching sight of her,

I wanted to smile a kind of secret recognition. But her eyes never rested long enough on mine to make even the slightest communication possible. After a little while, a man in a white linen suit, who had manœuvred his small car into a tiny space on the pavement right in front of our table, headed straight for the girl. She had apparently been waiting for him.

He looked like an American, and when I heard her call out to him, "Hi, Jerry!" it seemed highly probable that she was, too.

I felt deceived.

§ Ten §

THOUGH I did telephone Nordale the next day, I had already decided not to see him again. I honestly felt that we knew each other too little to sustain another conversation for any length of time. Besides that, I felt that I wanted a few completely free days in Paris before I went back to London. Those I had, very much on my own, feeling unusually quiet and observant and interested. The laziness and inactivity suited me : it was a short period in which I didn't want anything to happen. Generally that's a situation one cannot control—events have a way of presenting themselves, unwanted and uncalled-for. But in this instance I escaped any kind of entanglement. I concerned myself with finding places to eat ; tried every kind of apéritif ; I did tourist things, like Napoleon's Tomb and the Louvre and the Museum of Modern Art. I roamed the Boulevards and saw a lot of interesting faces, overheard some unbelievable conversations, stopped continually to look at things I would ordinarily have rushed past. Because of my mood, it wasn't a bit boring.

Then home again.

London is often such a joke. Just so I should make no mistake about where I was, it was raining in London when I arrived. The airlines bus ploughed its way through walls of rain. Everyone in the streets was bundled in coats again. The sun was busy elsewhere. This was the North with a

vengeance : heartless and hearty, orderly, stiff, absolutely unyielding.

My new secretary had a lot of disparaging things to say about it.

The cast were all in a state of dark depression when I arrived in Edinburgh to see Winky. They felt as if they had not gotten anywhere at all during the three weeks they had been on tour ; and the improvements they had confidently anticipated after the opening simply had not come to pass. They were thwarted and disgruntled—like children denied a promised gift. Croyden had firmly refused to change a word of the script, so that they still had to work within their familiar confines, already thoroughly explored. Tunnel had to admit to them frankly one night after a particularly drab and disheartening performance that he had exhausted every variation he knew, every trick, every piece of business.

Winky managed to laugh about it grimly, but she certainly wasn't happy.

I watched the first Edinburgh performance the night I arrived, and after that I could very clearly understand the feeling of the cast. Instead of developing with the ease of familiarity, the performance remained exactly where it had been in Manchester. It was as if the whole thing had gone in to deep-freeze. I don't mean that the acting was as uncertain as it had occasionally been, or that any of the actors was still nervous. No—it was just that no new discoveries had been made, there had been no further elaboration of the characters' relationships. Generally speaking, it seemed that they could go no deeper. The play itself resisted the kind of natural, instinctive penetration and unfolding of character and incident that usually take place when a competent cast come to grips with a well-conceived script.

"All it needs is a spot of tinkering," said Kenneth Ware after the performance. He had invited Winky and me to

have supper with him. "But Bobby Croyden is no tinkerer. Fact, he doesn't give a tinker's damn."

"You'd think he'd want to be sure of a success," I said.

"Takes that for granted. Minute he puts pen to paper visions of success dangle before his eyes."

Winky said bleakly: "He's going to have a little surprise this time."

Ware waved his knife at her. "Never can be sure, my dear. That's the theatre, nothing certain, nothing as you expect. Though I'll admit that even I can't see a run out of this play. The faithful can be counted on for six weeks, but after that . . ."

For Winky, it seemed to me, this must be especially distressing. It seemed ridiculous to have come so far to take part in a failure. Even her personal success seemed, that evening, to count for little.

But Ware's attitude was simple and very undisturbing. After so many years of successes *and* failures, so many years of openings and rehearsals and closings, tours, tantrums and deaths—he could no longer grieve unduly over one particular setback. He had the comfort of a wide perspective to help him place this success or that dud in its proper setting.

"It can never make you happy," he said, "to know you've been involved in a huge blunder. But think how much worse you'd feel if it were your money you were losing. I've never backed a horse or a play—one of my rules. Good thing to keep away from. Take my word for it."

We could not—the three of us—have made a very cheerful picture at our table. Winky said she wished she could get drunk without being sick. I felt vaguely frustrated by my inability to do anything about their situation, other than sympathize. And Ware's attempts to pass on to us the comforts of his wisdom didn't have any great effect.

When we had said good night to Ware and were up in the hotel-room, Winky said: "I'm *sick* of talking about the damned play! That's all we've been doing, breakfast,

lunch and dinner. And I thought it would be interesting to do a tour of England——”

“ Yes, I remember when you said that. I thought you were being kind of innocent about it.”

“ Oh, I was innocent all right ! But let’s not talk about it, honey. Why don’t you tell me all about Paris, instead ? ”

I automatically reached for a cigarette. “ What do you want to know ? ”

She stretched and yawned. “ Oh, you know. What it was like—who you saw and everything.”

“ As a matter of fact I practically kept to myself the whole time.”

“ You did ? Sounds dull. Not even a little casual affair ? ”

I was surprised by the question although she hadn’t placed any particular emphasis on it. “ No,” I said. “ Did you expect me to ? ”

“ I don’t know.” She shrugged her shoulders. “ That’s the kind of thing I don’t know about you.”

It occurred to me that she was being a bit cool. If this was her way of signing off, I couldn’t say it had caught me quite unexpectedly. And yet, if I understood her at all, it wasn’t her way. I couldn’t see her being devious.

“ What about you ? ” I said.

“ How ? ”

“ No little affairs while I was away ? ”

She laughed and seemed to enjoy it. “ Oh, maybe the littlest possible kind of affair.”

“ Are you serious ? ” I asked.

“ Well, sure, honey. Why not ? ”

It was strange that I should feel as discomposed as I did. Even the partly expected things can make their emotional effect : their jabs, their punches. It suddenly became very simple to me : I didn’t like the thought of her sleeping with somebody else.

“ Who was it ? ” I asked.

“ That’s always such a silly question. Does it matter ? ”

"I guess not."

With a laugh she dropped it. But I felt uncomfortable, and the atmosphere between us had become fuzzy and uncertain. Perhaps she wanted it that way.

It was hard for me to believe that her attitude could change significantly in three weeks ; and then I told myself it could have changed in one week, in a day, even in an hour. Our relationship had been a flimsy one, it wouldn't have taken much to undermine it. Is that what I had meant by our being free, uninvolved ?

I was unable to sleep. What I found myself doing was reconstructing the details of our meeting, the silly remarks I had made, the reservations I had felt all along. None of it hung together. I was like a man who thinks he will be unmoved by a friend's death, and then discovers, when that friend dies, that he reacts just as anyone else would react : with tears and regrets and despair. It always comes as a slight shock when you find your responses are conventional. It robs you of your sense of personality.

Winky became aware of my restlessness.

"What's the matter ?" she asked. "Can't you sleep ?"

"Guess not. Don't let it bother you."

"No. Tell me about it. But give me a cigarette first."

In the darkness I found the cigarettes and lit one for each of us.

"Come on, talk it out," she said.

It was tempting, in that dark and impersonal room, to be absolutely candid with her. It was tempting to drop my reservations, to tell her exactly how I felt and what I felt. The only difficulty was that my feelings themselves were very inexact : I didn't feel capable of analysing them.

All the same I tried : "You'll probably think it's damned funny——"

"What ?"

"Oh, what you said before. It bothered me."

"What did I say ?"

"About having an affair."

I heard her breath. "Oh, that ~~is~~" she said.

"Yes; it *is* funny, isn't it?"

"Do you think so, baby? You really think it's funny?"

I pondered for a minute. "Well, I don't mean that it's anything to howl with laughter about. It's just that I didn't expect it."

"No, I suppose you didn't."

Speaking in the dark wasn't as easy as I had thought it would be. It made me listen strenuously for her intonations and try to read meanings into them.

"You know what?" she said. "It wasn't true."

"What wasn't true?"

"About that affair. I didn't have any affair."

I seemed to need a deep breath. I said: "Well, why the hell did you say so?"

"God, you can be thick sometimes! I don't know why I said it—for kicks maybe. To see what you would say."

I was more confused than ever, though I knew it was a happier confusion.

"You still don't get it," she said. "You really need everything written out for you in capital letters, don't you? The only thing that would ever keep you happy is thinking that I didn't have any feelings. Well, goddam it, I *have* got feelings! I'm full of them! What I'm looking for is some in you. How am I supposed to know where I am with you when you're such a bastard! I wanted to see if you could even feel any jealousy—that's why I said it!"

"It was a lousy trick," I said.

"Oh, sure it was lousy—that's why I did it. That's how I am. Stinky Winky the guys all call me."

She waited as if to see what I would say. She had given me plenty to think about; it wasn't fair for her to think I could come back at her at once. She had all the advantage of attack and I was back against the ropes.

I said: "Do you hate me?"

" Sometimes."

" Right now ? "

" No. Right now I'm too damned busy hating myself. Like you once told me in no uncertain terms I'm not naïve. The least I ought to know is that you can't force these things out of people, not the things you really want anyway. But you make me so goddam mad."

I went over to her bed and lay down beside her. I had half expected her to shrug away from me but she didn't. All that I knew of her then was her perfume. It struck me with a shock that I could possibly mistake her body—but not the way her skin assimilated and changed any scent she used into a personal smell. When we were apart, I realized, it was her smell I remembered ; that far outweighed my visual or tactile memory of her.

" It *was* a lousy trick, you know," I whispered.

" I know. But it sort of worked."

" Yes—it worked all right. I felt like hell when I thought of you——"

" I want you to feel like hell sometimes. It doesn't hurt you."

" No."

She leaned over me to put out her cigarette in an ashtray on the night-table between our beds. Settled back beside me again, she said : " Tell me you love me."

" I love you," I said.

" But you don't mean it."

" Of course I mean it. But why are the words so important ? "

" They *are* important. I notice they're so important that you've never said them to me before."

" Neither have you."

She said impatiently, " Oh, it's been plenty obvious to you."

" What makes you think so ? Apparently you've been confused about me, but still you assume that I wouldn't have my confusions. That's not very bright."

"But I *have* made it obvious!" she insisted.

"That's what you think, baby. If it was so obvious as all that, why have I always been prepared to lose you?"

"I can't see that that's my fault. Just because you don't believe in me . . ."

"Listen, it's the same thing exactly," I said. "You don't believe in me . . . that's the horrible thing about it. Each of us has our own point of view to go by and if it's wrong there's nothing to check it against."

"Okay—but when have you ever even talked to me this way before?" Her voice was plaintive. For a moment I had a random vision of her on the stage. Matching her command and assurance there against the way she was now—subdued, reliant, dependent—I had a clearer sense of how strongly she felt.

I said: "Maybe we weren't ready. I have a feeling it might have been all wrong before to-night."

"But why?—that's what I don't understand. Baby, there were so many things I've wanted to tell you about: how cute you were when you used to come to pick me up at rehearsals. And all the times I loved you: like that first night I made dinner in the flat and one morning when you came back to bed after you'd shaved—"

"Why couldn't you tell me?"

"Why?" She had her answer all ready for me: "Because the rest of the time you were cold, just putting up with me. Nothing ever stopped you from rushing off to see that precious Lucy of yours—"

"Lucy?"

"Yes, baby; I mean Lucy. You might as well wise up to yourself about that. Just think it over some time when you're all alone. What do you think I've been fighting against?"

"I don't know, but it's not Lucy. Please—let's not get *that* complicated."

She sighed. "Don't call *me* complicated. Everything's

very simple with me, very simple and very clear. The only thing about me is that I'm *through* being kicked in the teeth by people. I've been through all that and there aren't going to be any repeats ! If there's any kicking to be done I'm doing it."

"But that doesn't make any sense, honey. You can't make up your mind about a thing like that."

"Oh, can't I?" She raised herself up on an elbow for a minute as if she needed a momentary emphasis, but then she lay back again and said: "If you think I can't make up my mind let me tell you a little story. . . . When I first went to New York I fell in love for the first time—*really* in love I mean. And, of course, leave it to me I picked on a real mixed-up boy, oh, brother, was he a lulu ! He was still going to Columbia then, getting his master's or doctor's, I don't remember which. He wanted to be a playwright and honest to God he had more talent than anybody I've ever known, the kind of mind I never expect to come across again. Nobody had ever tried to teach me anything until I met him. To me it seemed as though he knew everything. Whatever he told me, that was *it*. I guess what he really had was taste ; he knew all about music and books and paintings—the works in that line. It was a new world to me all right and just the world I was looking for. He was amazing, always ahead of everybody else. No kidding. Everything that he discovered in those days is public property now—he was just ten years ahead.

"Well, naturally, I lapped it up. Go ahead and laugh, that's the way I got culture. But if I gave you a list of all the things I wouldn't have known about if he hadn't told me—well, then you'd understand better what I mean. He not only taught me all about it, he also taught me that you don't have to go throwing it around. Listen, I know what people think about me sometimes—even you. That I'm vulgar and pinheaded. Do you know that doesn't matter to me? I don't give a damn in hell if people get that

impression of me. Martin gave me a certain kind of faith in myself that nobody can shake—not even you. By the time we were through I had more faith in myself than he had in *himself*, that's the way it goes sometimes. . . .

"I won't go into all the details. Anyway, I loved him like all get out. It won't ever be that way again. I admired him, I was proud of him, I was hot for him—it doesn't very often click like that. I'm telling you I was nervous any time I was away from him. Even after a year I got the same kick out of meeting him somewhere—and we saw each other every single day. I kept on changing my apartment, getting gradually closer to him, until somebody moved out of his house and I moved in there. I couldn't get near enough."

"But I said before he was mixed up. It was pretty damn complicated and, of course, I was too young to understand much about it. Naturally his trouble was sex. He was scared stiff of it, I mean really, physically scared of it. It all came out pretty soon after I first knew him because he had to tell me about it. He was afraid of me, afraid I would be expecting it and here he was sweating with fear. It was a horrible thing, I should have sent him to an analyst right away. But I was so crazy about him I just accepted it. I *knew* it was honest, I could see it. But he was like a god to me ; you don't ask questions, you don't try to change things. You just love it.

"So we hardly ever touched each other. Sometimes if he felt especially good or excited about something or happy he'd give me a peck on the cheek or squeeze my arm. But not very often—he really avoided physical contact, almost the way you avoid a spider or a bee. And yet we were very free in other ways. He used to change his clothes in front of me and I can remember a couple of times when it was very hot in New York we used to lie around his apartment naked. But it was sexless, absolutely sexless. I realize now it was killing me all the time. You see, on top of everything else he was a beauty. To me, anyway. I loved everything

about him—his head, his hair, his eyes. I used to want to just touch his ears. . . . God, he was wonderful !

“ Most of the time we were very private. Oh, we had a couple of friends but they never seemed to mean much to either of us. After we saw them we'd laugh about them. Oh, we were very superior ; really we were kind of poisonous. The people we liked best were the ones we despised ; we had little private ways of making fun of them to their faces without their ever knowing it. I don't think there were many people who liked us. Why in God's name would they ? Everybody always thought we were having a dull placid affair, it certainly must have looked that way to anybody from outside. The kind of fun we had between ourselves wasn't the kind anybody else could understand and they certainly couldn't share it. Even if they didn't catch on that we were making fun of them I guess they felt uncomfortable with us. But we didn't give a damn, we were mean as hell because we were so satisfied with each other.

“ For about a year it went that way, we were absolutely involved with each other. And then I went and had an affair with a guy in the Army. Nothing I'm ashamed of, he was a real doll. If everything had been normal he was the kind of guy who would have stuck to me and we would probably have gotten married after the war. But he knew I was only half with him, he met Martin and finally realized he couldn't compete with *that*. So he gave up and, you know, I didn't give a damn. I felt as if I had been right to have the affair even though I was pretty damn cold-blooded about it, but I never wanted him to come between Martin and me. The only thing I didn't expect was that Martin should get jealous about it. I told him about it thinking we could get some laughs out of it. Laughs ? My God, he was *livid* ! You realize I didn't understand that he was sick, I didn't really know about those things. Anyway, he killed the affair for me even though it didn't mean anything in

the first place. I wasn't going to have another one very quick ; Martin made it seem all wrong. He messed it up—but good.

"So then, young as I was, I faced a life of no affairs. That's the way Martin wanted it. Oh, he didn't say that in so many words—it wasn't as though he made outright demands. But I knew him well enough by then. Two words out of him and I knew everything he was feeling. That's the way we operated.

"And one day I brought home a girl from dancing class. She was for laughs, too. She was a big dumb blonde type—at least that's the first impression she gave. Later I got to have a lot of respect for her but not at the beginning. Martin got the point right away ; he thought she was a scream all right. Funny thing is that they got along rather well. He didn't scare her at all and he was a different kind of guy from what she was used to. She sort of surprised both of us after a while and we both got to like her. I thought of her as a friend and she only came to see us when I invited her. You know—it's funny the way these things happen. One day about two months after I first brought her home I realized we were becoming a threesome. She was getting so she knew all our private jokes, and every now and then it even seemed to me she and Martin had a couple of jokes that didn't include me.

"Once she asked me why Martin and I didn't get married. She was such an intimate friend by then that I told her about his difficulty and a whole lot of things that weren't really her business at all. I realize that now, but at the time it seemed perfectly natural. She couldn't understand what it really was about and—you know—jokingly she said all he needed was to be raped. She'd be glad to do it, she said, only he wasn't her type, she went only for blondes—big Swedes and Germans, oh, as well as anybody with money, small, dark or fat. We had a laugh over it and everything was all right. In a way, of course, I was glad she couldn't understand. That

was *my* property. I was the only one who could understand Martin.

"But the situation was never the same after that. It was changing fast, every day. Sally was with us all the time now. She was often with Martin when I was busy, they had meals together without me, they took walks, went to the movies, museums, or just sat and bulled. She was getting an education, you might say. And I looked around one day and said to myself, Hey what gives? All I could see was that he looked forward to seeing her in a way I'd never noticed before. He kept telling me little things she had said, some idea or other they had hatched together. And I was supposed to split my sides laughing and enjoy the whole thing. He even got started on her looks. He made her let her hair grow out, he told her how to dress. Oh, it was an obsession all right and all he wanted me to do was sit there and watch it.

"But I wasn't built that way. I couldn't really blame Sally, I never thought it was her fault. But still and all it was plenty heart-breaking for me. Sometimes I'd stand in the hall outside his door and I'd hear their voices inside and I was burning up with jealousy. Even though she knew about his so-called problem I kept on imagining every possible kind of thing.

"Well, anyway, Sally wasn't so happy about it either. She could see what I was going through, she was a big-hearted girl and it wasn't as if she was crazy about him the way I was. She never had any intention of devoting herself to him even though she liked him a hell of a lot. She started trying to get together with me, telling me how it was all wrong, how she wanted to step out of the picture. The picture I'd put her into myself. And all I could say was no—she meant so much to Martin and all that. You can see what kind of fool I was!

"I don't want to go into it all. One day she told me that he had kissed her. Boy, that was a kick in the pants for me!

I could remember when I would have given anything for a kiss from him and I had been so glad for those pecks on the cheek. Well, I knew it wasn't going to stop there. I knew it, I KNEW it! It was as if they were sliding down a hill and nothing could stop them.

"You see, living in the same building I could pretty well check up on everything he did. I haunted that door of his, three times a night I'd go up and listen. Well, one night I figured out that she had been there the whole night. I couldn't stand it. I saw her the next day and I just asked her straight out. I've got to hand it to her, she didn't try to lie. She burst out crying, she said they had gone to bed, he'd insisted. She said it was awful, the whole thing—such a struggle, such a performance—you could imagine after he'd been dried up and terrified all those years. . . .

"I can't tell you how I felt, I really could never explain it to anybody and I don't even want to remember. It was like cramps, a real gripping pain somewhere in the middle of me. I just sat there and stared at her and I wanted to know everything. The only thing I held on to was that she kept on saying how terrible it had been. That I lapped up, it couldn't have been terrible enough to satisfy me.

"Well—you live through everything and anything. That's one of these things they say that's true. I went back to the house and finally I went to see him. I don't know what I meant to do—I hated him, I despised him. I told him what Sally had said. Is it true? I said, knowing damn well it was. And he said yes. He hung his head a little, I think he understood what it meant to me but I don't think he could have helped himself. It was like something that was simply in the cards.

"You know what I said then? You won't believe it, I can hardly believe it myself. I said, Will you go to bed with me? And he looked me straight in the eyes. I'm telling you he was disgusted, I could see it there. He just said no.

"So I got very melodramatic. Oh, it was a real production

number ! I said I was through, he wouldn't see me again, all that kind of stuff. I don't know why, it wasn't as if I could scare him that way. But somehow or other he *was* scared. He said he needed me. I meant more to him than Sally did ; I meant more than anybody. But on a different level.

" Maybe now I would be able to understand what he meant but I'm not even sure of that. Though I think it was true, that I had become a kind of backbone for him. But all I knew then was that I didn't want to stay in the market for that kind of relationship. I quit there and then. You know, it makes you feel better to do something drastic sometimes, no matter what it is. I moved out, I kept away from him. All I hoped was that he was suffering, I'm telling you I felt real evil about him. . . .

" Oh, I saw him a couple of times after that. He had some things of mine, I had some of his records and books ; after such a long time as that you get sort of mixed up about what belongs to whom. But whenever I saw him it was uncomfortable, for both of us. I got so I felt almost sympathetic towards him, I was interested in what he was doing and all that. I even forgave him in my own mind, but I never tried to get back that old feeling about him. No—I tried to get rid of it. . . .

" You see what I mean when I say I've been hurt ? Nobody could ever hurt me quite that way again—but I'm not planning to let anybody try. Not even you, baby ; don't even waste your time trying because you don't stand a chance. I'm tough. . . .

" That's the way it is. I want you to love me but I'm not going to break myself up over you or get bitched up by it. I like myself too much for that. Thanks to *him*.

" So just tell me you love me, Bunny. Make it good. Make it convincing."

We spent the next morning being just two more American tourists in Edinburgh. Perhaps we looked at less : the Castle

tired us out. But we walked around the town, sat in the parks, watched other people and let them watch us. We had reached a sense of closeness that made us hold on to each other. We held hands in the street, in a restaurant, at the bar. Even when we went upstairs to the room again, we just sat there and held hands. In the afternoon it rained, and we watched from the hotel window. An illusion of privacy held us captive ; happy ; not very talkative. There seemed to be a chance that the outside world had disappeared. Facing Castle Hill, that abrupt protuberance smack in the middle of the city, we were aware only of history and ourselves. That's the kind of day it was, making something romantic even out of the clanking of the trams.

Later I watched Winky polish her nails. I got her to tell me more about her life in New York. I watched her all the time, remembering that I had thought her eyes mournful—as they were. She had a capacity for making me feel both sad and happy about her ; a feeling less mixed than it sounds, because the two elements were so strongly fused. I was chary of saying too much to her ; I didn't want anything to sound insincere. There was no need to be explicit : the atmosphere we created between ourselves was full of understandings that needed no expression. So what we talked about was the colour of her nail-polish ; the aspects of British life that seemed strange and serious and comical to her ; the weather and other days it reminded us of.

While all the time another, unspoken conversation was going on between us.

We had a huge tea alone, and later a drink alone. Life discreetly gave us a wide berth. Without trying, we avoided the people we knew ; and wherever we were, there was an island.

I took her to the theatre, kissed her there, told her I loved her, and took the night-train back to London.

§ Eleven §

MARIANNE came back from Rapallo a few days before the London opening. She phoned me, as if to announce herself, and then said that she had some news of Lucy. She and Lucy had become so disassociated in my mind that even hearing her say the name momentarily surprised me.

Would I come round to the house for a drink ? she asked.

And when I appeared at the house, she said : " I suppose it was rude of me not to ask you to bring Miss March. Or should I call her Isobel now that she's such a good friend of yours ? "

We went into that clubroom again and sat in the same chairs as last time. For me, however, it was anything but a repeat performance. It was hard for me to judge how much I might have changed, but the changes in Marianne were large and distinct, even though they had taken place in an amazingly short time. I would always have said that Marianne was a person who had a good hold on herself ; at least it was a grip she never appeared to lose. But now—and it had first become evident to me in Manchester—she had filled out with a kind of self-satisfaction that was something new to me. She seemed to be on the way to becoming ' a grand lady '—in the sense that she sat back with a smile on her face, superior, complacent, taunting, almost condescending ; exhibiting what I would call a woman-of-the-world look. Her expression seemed to tell me that she was

amused by the world, amused by me ; she could afford to laugh at the expense of others because she was so secure in herself.

All these currents, so obvious in her as she looked at me, should not have made her seem attractive—and yet she was. Tanned, glowing, generally smarter in her appearance than ever before, she was undeniably a handsome woman.

I decided to pass off her opening remark by saying that Winky was still in Edinburgh. Without allowing her time for a reaction—arch or interested or sympathetic, as it might have been—I asked about Lucy.

She said : “ I wondered if you’d remember her but then it seemed to me that she made a certain impression on you. Was I right ? ”

“ Oh, yes,” I confessed. “ I thought she was an awfully interesting girl.”

“ Apparently. But you didn’t tell me that you’d gone down to Rome to see her. That sounded frightfully romantic.”

“ Not at all. But who told you about that ? ”

Marianne gave me her full smile again. “ Oh, there was a horrid old gossip in Rapallo who seemed to know all about Lucy’s affairs. A Frenchwoman staying at the next villa. It really was rather killing. She had a violent crush on Daddy and found every sort of excuse to come over to see us. It was madly funny! And, of course, Mummy was outrageous, encouraging her and playing up to her all the time. The poor old dear was very puzzled.”

“ I can see you were having a busy time,” I said.

“ It wasn’t too bad, as a matter of fact. This was one of the few times when Daddy wasn’t working there, you see, so we gave a couple of parties and saw hordes of people. I don’t remember exactly how this creature discovered that we knew the Forlanes. Somehow or other Lucy’s name came up in the ordinary way and her tongue started going like a firecracker. I suppose she felt it made a *bond*.”

" And what did it all amount to ? "

Momentarily prim, she said : " Well, it's rather shocking. Are you sure you want to know ? "

She made me impatient ; she was making too much of a good thing of it. Especially since it was a ' secret ' I was pretty sure I already knew. From her point of view, no doubt, it was worth eking out ; and she wasn't above a bit of healthy teasing. But all I wanted to know was exactly what version of Lucy's private affairs was going the rounds.

" At least," I said, " I know that *you* want me to know."

I hadn't meant to be offensive. Sometimes there are little conversational traps we get caught in without meaning to ; it's as if the sheer momentum and sequence of words force us into statements we'd much prefer not to make.

But Marianne was not for taking offence. She laughed ; she unbent slightly ; she was confident in her control. Did she consider that she was not herself about to gossip ? Maybe she had even become versed in the practices of self-deception. Certainly that would have to be one of the accomplishments of a woman of the world.

" This woman," she said, " whose name I've already forgot—had a sister who's married to the artist Nordale. (D'you know his work ?) One didn't get the impression that she cared very much for this sister of hers ; I gathered she was a bit of a tart and all that. At any rate, Nordale and his wife have been separated for several years, fairly amicably from the sound of it. Except that now Nordale's taken on a mistress and do you know who that is ? "

" I should say that was obvious, Marianne." She was annoying me ; I didn't like the way she was drawing it out, treating it like the delicious titbit she clearly considered it.

" Oh, dear, I'm not telling this right ! " she said.

It was difficult for me to sit still and be polite. I wondered why I had ever liked her.

" But don't you think it's odd ? " she went on. " Little

Lucy living with a married Frenchman?" She made it sound as if every item of her question was odd in itself: little Lucy, a married man *and* a Frenchman.

"Why odd?" I said. "As a matter of fact, I've known about it for some time. I've met Nordale and there's nothing the slightest bit odd about him. I'd call him a pretty solid character."

"You knew?" she said without masking her surprise.

"Yes, it all came out in Rome. And you don't seem to have gotten the crux of the story which is that Nordale would gladly divorce his wife except that his mother won't allow it."

"His mother? What's she got to do with it?"

Winky would have told her not to be so thick: I simply said, "Catholic."

"Oh, quite. . . . But do you think it's a good idea?"

"What?"

"Lucy's living with him. It sounded as if they'd really set up an apartment together somewhere in Paris. I mean——"

"But, Marianne, that's entirely for Lucy to decide. Apparently she's in love with the man, she's in no position to think about its being a good idea or not."

I thought that she was beginning to enjoy her little scene less than she had anticipated. As I've said, Marianne was clever: she could get the point.

"Frankly I find it incredible," she said. "She's too young. I'm sure it's all wrong."

"Don't tell me you want to *do* something about it!"

"But how do you suppose I'd feel about it?"

I said: "I think you ought to take it for granted and not give it another thought. There's nothing too young about Lucy. You may think of her as a child because that's what she was when you first knew her—but do remember, Marianne, she's not a child now. And Nordale is a perfectly adult, serious and intelligent man."

"When did you meet him?" she asked.

"We all met him in Paris that day when you went back to London."

"Oh, then I *did* miss something," she said smiling.

"If you want to think of it that way I suppose you can. Victor was with us, you remember. In fact, I believe Victor's been trying to arrange a show for Nordale here in London."

"Really? I suppose, then, Lucy would come over with him?"

"I have no idea."

She remained silent for a minute, and then spoke more earnestly: "I wonder if we haven't all neglected Lucy a little. I mean Mummy and Daddy. Maybe we should have invited her to Rapallo——"

"To help her get over this?"

"Oh, no, I didn't mean it that way. You *do* make me out a kind of witch, don't you? I was just thinking of her alone in Paris without any friends."

"I should imagine she has quite a few by now," I said. "No, Marianne, I don't think you need to worry about neglecting Lucy. She's got to work it out her own way and not anybody else's. I don't see why they shouldn't be perfectly happy as long as she can keep straight with her family."

"Yes, I wondered about that. I suppose you'd call them rather sophisticated people, but even so——"

"I think Lucy can handle even that. Anyway I don't understand how anybody could find it a shocking situation——well, that was *your* word. Just think of George Eliot, horse-face and all, in the thick of Victorian London, living in sin——what else would you call it? Or does one excuse it because she was a great writer?"

"And George Sand and Chopin——yes, I know. But you are serious about it, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am——simply because I'm all for leaving people's lives to themselves. My feeling is as trite as that."

"I agree with you, then. Forgive me and let's have another drink."

She poured the drinks and, while I waited for her, I realized that I had actually gotten hot with anger.

The gossip session was over. I don't know, of course, what Marianne's private thoughts were at the moment, but she certainly knew mine.

"Mummy and Daddy get back on Sunday," she said. "Apparently the play's done very well in Edinburgh."

"Your father will go to the opening, Thursday?" I asked.

"Oh, yes! He's awfully keen this time. You know he thinks this is his best play."

"And how do you feel about it?" I asked, as if I could test her sincerity that way.

"I think the play is what I expect of Daddy," she said without hesitation, "but I *was* a little worried about the production at Manchester. I think I mentioned that to you, didn't I?"

"Yes . . . you know I saw it in Edinburgh, too."

"Oh, did you? It should have been lots better there. I told Daddy what I thought was wrong and he sent Frank a long wire. I trust the changes were made. You see—Daddy's plays hardly need a producer at all; he's so aware of the stage when he writes and everything is right there in the script."

I knew that Tunnel, with all his experience, disagreed on that point; as well as Kenneth Ware. But, in a way, I thought it was right that Marianne should admire her father so much. How much worse it would have been for her if she shared my feelings!

Basking was announced about then. She hadn't mentioned him, but was clearly expecting him. He came in and held her hand. They didn't kiss. I wondered whether this was their general practice or an exercise of decorum in front of me.

He called me 'the American Embassy man' before Marianne broke in with my name. It was part of his social

procedure to show that he placed me and knew exactly who I was, even though he hadn't remembered my name. He also made it appear that this was much preferable to his having remembered my name but not who I *was*. It was a subtle distinction, characteristic of him, and I found myself in agreement.

"I suppose you'll be at the great event on Thursday," he said.

"Yes, indeed. Having been to two openings in the provinces I wouldn't want to back out now."

"Quite—that's the true gambler's way."

Marianne drew his attention from me. This was apparently their first meeting since her return. She was telling him that he really should have visited Rapallo: so many of their friends had been there. But he made no pretence of regret. He had preferred being lazy in the wilds of Scotland where *none* of his friends were.

Friends were sometimes overrated, he said. It was better just to have friends than to see them.

"I don't believe you mean that for a minute," said Marianne.

"I'm not sure whether I do or not now that you challenge me. Sometimes I just like the sound of the things I say."

And what had I been doing? He turned back to me. I told them about Paris in August, tried unsuccessfully to describe the way I had enjoyed it. But how could one enjoy doing nothing? It was hard to convince Marianne, I knew, but I wasn't sure that Basking might not understand.

In fact he did. "It's enough just to be in Paris," he said. "I envy you, even simply sitting on a bench in the Tuileries. You ought to have stayed at the Meurice and got a room with a view. . . . Why do people say London is the centre of the world when it's not? Paris is the centre of everything."

Marianne gave him an indulgent smile, intimating that she understood all this nonsense of his, laughed at it and forgave it. She treated him as idiosyncratic. I wondered, though,

whether she was right. It seemed to me that Basking might be a much simpler person than she gave him credit for—or than she wanted him to be.

She felt called upon to invite me to have dinner with them at the Etoile ; but I wasn't in a mean enough mood to take her up on it. As I left she said there would probably be a party at the house after the opening and that I should consider myself invited.

Winky surprised me on Sunday by arriving in excellent spirits. The overnight train-trip had been fun, with most of the cast aboard and lots to drink and laugh about. There had been a temporary relaxation of tension for all of them ; Thursday evening seemed far away. And in the meantime—no performances for three nights. It was a great relief.

"I've been away so long," she cried in the flat. "God save me from another tour ever." All I want is to be home, wherever I am. It's Sunday and I'm home and I don't have to face that hotel lobby again. Oh, baby, it's wonderful !"

Her spirits didn't flag during the interim. She remained remarkably buoyant, even as Thursday approached. She was prepared for the worst, so nothing could really jolt her. Her days, while I was at Grosvenor Square, she spent in walking around London, shopping, simply enjoying another bout of good weather. Every day she met me at the Square and we started a habit of lunching in a pub on Mount Street, where she was much admired. Once or twice we shifted to another pub we liked, off Charles Street, and when we returned to Mount Street the following day she was greeted with relief—as if the regulars had been afraid of her forsaking them.

Winky was so good with these strangers. Once they had overcome the conventions sufficiently to greet us and then to speak to us, she was always brimming over with laughter. She lampooned her own Americanisms ; she told good jokes ; she made the men go back to their offices feeling gay,

self-confident, intoxicated with something more than their half-pints of mild or bitter.

And all the while I knew she watched me to see if it was all right with me. Actually I egged her on. This was the way I liked her best, at the top of her form, in control of her audience.

I don't think the habitués ever knew exactly who she was. The question came up sometimes, in a form of banter, but she would say that she was an aeroplane hostess, or an unemployed gold-digger, or the tuba-player*in an all-girls' band. It wasn't that she made herself a figure of mystery ; she simply enjoyed the lack of identity. She preferred, in this company, to be only herself and not a name ; she was ' Winky ' to them.

She telephoned me on Thursday at about four. " I just wanted you to know I'm feeling fine," she said. " Nothing to worry about. Stay calm. It'll all be over before you know it."

I had to laugh at her reassurances. In fact, I knew that she was fine and would be fine. She was not going to repeat the mistakes of the Manchester opening, and Kenneth Ware wasn't going to have to save her.

That was all I felt certain about. I went to the theatre alone. The prospect of seeing the play again was anything but exciting ; I liked it less each time I sat through it. But the atmosphere of opening night, created largely by people uninvolved in the production, managed to work on me. I watched the people ambling towards their seats, people who had just come from having drinks and would be going on to dinner or a party. During the intermissions they would be in the bars, discussing and recognizing one another, and being interrupted in their conversations by the buzzer. These were hardly the people who counted ; certainly their opinions didn't count, and even their appearance was only a matter of show—for, in the main, they were either friends of Croyden, friends of Tunnel, friends of the cast (like me), friends of the backers, or just friends of friends. In fact, nobody seemed to

count except the critics—and perhaps the gallery. I realized how small the *real* audience was. It was a disheartening thought. While the bulk of the audience were there simply to enjoy, those few were there to judge.

Croyden didn't come to his box until the lights went down. Marianne and her mother came in first; Croyden a few minutes later with Basking. One couldn't make out much of them in the dark, but it seemed to me that Croyden put himself into a position from which he could see very little of the stage. I thought this was deliberate on his part, not a matter of politeness to the others. It was a kind of self-effacement that he may have thought appropriate to the occasion. And who was there to question him, since the occasion was so familiar to him? It was only natural that he should be an expert, even at this. His being in a box at all was a grand gesture: it asserted his confidence and showed him to be inviolable. He dared the gallery to boo him by making himself so prominent. It was a grand gesture all right; and also, it struck me, a brave one. It would certainly be easier to accept the booing *in absentia*. But does any playwright ever expect his work to be booed? Doesn't he always think the audience will be intelligent enough to see his points, discriminating enough to appreciate his style, tolerant enough to overlook his mistakes?

I couldn't help getting absorbed in the performance, familiar as I was with it. This time, being part of a new and crucial audience, I tried to observe the play with fresh senses. I kept myself from anticipating, made the most of enjoyable moments—but there were no surprises for me. The stiffness remained indestructible, and I suddenly realized it wasn't a play at all. It was Croyden's personal view of what a play should be: a stilted conversation piece, lacking in story and movement, emphasizing ideas and character. A view that I would have accepted if his ideas had been original or his characters convincing. But to me they seemed small patchwork characters expressing small and not very stimulating

ideas ; and the style itself was grandiose, inflated, and peculiarly antiquated.

I thought it was all a mess. I wanted to slip away and have no part of it. But Winky kept me involved in it ; I had to see her through.

The audience chattered just as loudly as one expects during the intermissions. They did all they were called upon to do : the bars were lively, the corridors crowded with the sounds of laughter, gossip, badinage. The audience's performance was first-rate : well-rehearsed and professional. Their script didn't have to make sense or be exciting or build to climaxes. They had all the advantage.

The Croyden box remained unperturbed. There, too, the performance was professional. Marianne and Basking leaned towards each other to speak. She smiled and turned her ear to his mouth. He said something to Mrs. Croyden who nodded her head serenely and included her husband with a glance. They were as composed as a royal family, and as much aware of the audience's interest in them. They sat in their box not, indeed, for the sake of privacy, but in order to be available to the view of their admirers. It all had absolutely nothing of that raffish atmosphere that so often surrounds the theatre : no Broadway or even West End spice. None of those hangers-on with gimmicks, big deals, exploitation schemes, ballyhoo. It was much, much too respectable for that.

The last act was unmistakably the best that evening. It was exhilarating to see how intelligently Winky pressed towards the climax. If it was true that her little trick at the end had been unconscious that first night in Manchester, it was no longer true. Now she knew exactly what she was doing ; and yet she was intelligent and gifted enough not to work too hard at it. She contrived to keep it a mystery of her own—that hint of Peggy's inescapable unhappiness at the end.

It almost seemed to me that Winky had succeeded in her

frivolous wish to be like Lucy. I had the sense, at least, of Lucy's vulnerable innocence, her thwarted eagerness for security, and the minor doom that seemed to dangle over her : a threat of unforeseen disappointments. I was touched nearly to tears by seeing this in Winky. It actually made me uneasy—as if it were all wrong to look at one person and think of another.

The reception of the play was described next morning in one of the tabloids as tumultuous. I wouldn't care to argue that ; I was too lost in myself to know. The experience turned out to be, in the end, more than I had bargained for. I had lost all sense of judgment.

I was aware of Croyden coming forward in his box to bow his sleek white head to the audience ; I saw Basking embarrassed, shrinking from attention. And Mrs. Croyden, colourless as a duenna, faded out of view.

It was all over. After the curtain calls, the clapping, the shouting, there was something conclusive about the way the audience rose when they knew they were no longer needed. We all filed out, slowly but purposefully ; social laughter still trailed in the air. Behind us the ushcrettes raced back and forth pushing up seats.

There was no hurry for me. I waited for a while outside the stage door and smoked a cigar. It was drizzling out there behind Shaftesbury Avenue. A certain amount of the usual activity was taking place at the stage door : people being denied entrance, others being passed through by the omnipotent doorman. He took his prerogatives very seriously and could be as rude to a top hat as he was to the young fans who crowded around him.

As far as I was concerned I had very little inclination to go in. I felt deflated, incapable of enthusiasm or hypocrisy. The most I wanted was to be alone with Winky—and to-night of all nights she did not belong to me, but to the public ; to her career ; to all those people of small or great influence who were going to help her to get ahead. Only after they had all

been taken care of and she had become tired of smiling and shaking hands would she belong to me.

Knowing this, I finally pushed my way in as the doorman winked at me. In her dressing-room Winky sat looking at herself in the mirror, completely absorbed and holding one of the roses I had sent her. I kissed her before she had become aware of me. She jumped around and said : " It was okay, wasn't it ? "

" Listen, baby, you were wonderful," I said. " Everything you wanted to be."

There were other people in the room—I couldn't understand their purpose. Anyway, she ignored them, looked at me earnestly and we had a moment to ourselves. " Everything *you* wanted ? " she asked.

" Absolutely—the whole works."

The atmosphere was not very different at Croyden's house. For once the place was invaded, and now there was no box to separate the Family from the *polloi*. Croyden was putting on a brave face ; I saw him mingling with rather shabby people who must have had some peripheral importance in his professional life. Even he, it appeared, had to make the occasion compromise, had to be ' a good joe ' for a couple of hours. In the flush of his success, he played the part rather well ; though to anyone who knew his private personality it was obvious that he was exhibiting a *persona* other than his own.

I had to give up Winky almost immediately after we entered the house. I knew I was virtually useless to her here and found my way to the bar, where Kenneth Ware appeared to be firmly entrenched.

" Watch out for the photographers," he said, greeting me. " Don't want to get your face plastered over the evening rags, do you ? "

" I don't give a damn," I said.

" That's the professional spirit ! . . . Well—it looks as if we were all wrong."

"How do you mean?"

"About the play, dear boy. It looks like one of the biggest things Croyden's done. Tremendous advance bookings—fantastic reception to-night—looks absolutely set."

"What about the reviews?"

Ware shook his head. "They're not going to spoil the fun. Mark my words—enthusiastic, that's what they'll be. You can smell it."

I took a drink and said: "I don't believe it."

"You've got no choice," said Ware. "None at all."

"The first two acts were lousy."

"Oh, Bobby's outfoxed us all. Hate to see him smug but he deserves it. Stuck to his guns in spite of everything."

I said: "What about Tunnel? You could tell *he* hated it."

"Who's Tunnel? What's Tunnel? Now they'll all say Bobby really knows the theatre. Well, he does at that—we all know the theatre. Enough to know that you never know."

"You're a turncoat," I said.

He was captured by an attractive tall grey-haired woman who wanted to say admiring things to him. I stood alone near the bar and watched Marianne, across the wide room, stopping for a word with everyone she passed. Even though she was the kind of English girl who looks her best in tweed suits, she was wearing her evening dress that night with unaccustomed flair. I had been right in thinking of her as a handsome woman: it was showing splendidly just then.

I saw Tunnel with his harassed look, talking to Beryl Jamison. There were others I vaguely recognized as drifters around the theatre. And all around me were those like myself: people who hardly knew anyone else, and had been invited for some flimsy reason. I could tell them by their set smiles. I suppose I had one on, too; it's easier than frowning into a crowd of unknown people.

"There you are!" a voice called from behind me. I

didn't place it as Basking's until I turned around. "Is the champagne worth tasting?" he asked, then guffawed as if he had quoted a joke.

I said: "Would you doubt it in this house?"

"No, you're quite right, quite right. I say, this isn't my sort of gathering. I don't think I know a soul here outside of you and the Croydens."

"I'm not much better off," I said. "Though I know some of the cast."

"Well—you could practically *mingle*! But it's rather a bore for me. I'd have been glad to stay away but Marianne seemed to think it would be good for my character to see some new people."

I looked around the room again, as if to size up the crowd and how they would appear to Basking. Knowing nothing about the people he generally mixed with, I couldn't have any idea what this sort of group meant to him. Like myself, he probably disliked crowds of people in any circumstances. A crowd automatically annuls the individuality of its components.

"The only thing to do," he continued, "is to take up a place near the bar and become immovable. . . . Is that whisky you're drinking? Maybe that's a better idea than champagne. Yes, you're quite right."

He turned to one of the bartenders and gave a somewhat fussy order: so much whisky, so much soda, a sprinkle of bitters.

With glass in hand, he resumed his position next to me. "That American girl——" he said, "the March girl, I mean, she did a stupendous job to-night. I do hope she's not going to be spoilt."

"I thought she was fine, too," I said, like a spectator giving an impersonal judgment. "But how do you mean spoilt?"

"I mean that I shouldn't like her to get too tricky. You know how actors are, they get more and more technique, as they call it, and then all that feeling and fire that she's got,

for instance, why, it evaporates ! I found myself admiring her because it seemed that technique was secondary with her, d'you see what I mean ? I had the feeling that she does a thing first out of instinct and then, well, afterwards maybe she discovers *how* she does it. When it's the other way round it shows, you know."

" Sometimes," I said. " But what about those French actors you're so hipped on ? Isn't that all technique ? "

" Of course," he laughed. " But that's the convention after all. As long as it's this anæmic Anglo-American theatre we're talking about, then it might as well be natural and instinctive."

I looked at him appraisingly. " You ought to do something in the theatre, you know."

" Everybody says that sooner or later when they've heard me spouting, but it's not true. Nobody realizes that I'm only a happy spectator, that's my place in life. Some people do things and others just appreciate them. I've decided one's no better than the other since they go hand in hand, don't you see ? My kind of people support the doers. . . . What I'd really like to be is a patron."

" Do you see yourself as a Medici ? "

He looked at his glass of whisky and then drained it before answering. " No, not as a Medici, just a Basking."

I don't think he was trying to put me in my place. He said things like that in such a simple way that they sounded only like a faithful expression of his thoughts. He succeeded in never sounding pompous or complacent, though his combination of youth and title might have encouraged him in those directions.

" I'd like to meet that girl," he said. " Miss March."

" Yes ? Well, if we can get hold of her I'll introduce you. Do you see her ? "

Winky didn't seem to be in the room : but we were interrupted in any case by Marianne, who had progressed around the room and now stood beside us. Most people

would have been bored by what she was doing, but I could see that she was excited by it—her face flushed, her eyes sharp and inquiring. Basking lit a cigarette for her, but she refused a drink.

"It's hard enough as it is remembering everybody's name," she explained. "One drink and they would all become Jones. . . . Anybody you want to talk to?"

"Each other," said Basking.

"That makes it simple."

"What about Isobel?" I said.

"Oh, yes," Basking smiled. "I did say I'd like to meet her."

Marianne said: "Isobel March? She's in the other room with Daddy."

She took his hand. "Come along. I'll tell her you're an ardent admirer and then I'll leave you to work that out with her somehow."

As they left, she asked me to wait for her to come back.

I noticed other people turning to watch them cross the room. No doubt they were already talked about in those circles that talk about people. I wondered if they enjoyed that. Both of them were probably used to a certain amount of attention; they had lived a good part of their lives in the public eye, and must have a full appreciation of 'talk'.

All activity and conversation were halted by the abrupt sound of a singer who had suddenly decided to give a little recital. She was a tall thin woman, with bobbed hair; she was dressed rather plainly in blue satin. Another woman, curiously similar in appearance, accompanied her at the piano. It was all quite embarrassing. No doubt someone had brightly suggested to her that she simply must sing. Probably this happened at every party she went to. I turned to the bar and ordered another drink, trying not to listen. It was an English song, rather like something out of the opera *Tom Jones*. Maybe that's exactly what it was.

Marianne caught me just as I thought I might get a laughing fit.

"Oh, my God," she said, "who started Harriet off?"

"Don't know. She was just suddenly *there*. Without even a warning signal."

"It's such a shame. Nobody has the heart to tell her. . . . Let's find a quiet corner somewhere."

She led me out of the room and then up the hall stairs. We could not move unimpeded; people apparently felt called upon to say something—anything—to her. It was very party-ish. I hadn't been at anything like it for a long time; even the Embassy functions were more austere.

Once we were upstairs, though, the hubbub seemed far away. It was a small sitting-room we went into—just what she'd called it: a quiet corner.

"For some reason," said Marianne, "I'm exhausted."

"I'm not surprised. How long will it go on?"

"About another hour, I suppose. Then there are the few that linger—always. What time is it? Twelve? Oh, they'll go soon."

I said: "I gather it's a happy occasion."

She smiled appreciatively. "So it would appear. I wasn't very worried about it. You see, Daddy knows what he's doing."

Somehow she made it sound as if he had pulled off a successful business deal or a political coup. None of it seemed to have anything to do with art. In a way I didn't mind that. I knew so many unsuccessful writers and painters, so many thwarted government workers. It was agreeable for once to breathe the rare rich aroma of a real success. I profited from it doubly, for it was Winky's success as well as Croyden's. I liked the feel and glow of it.

"What I wanted to talk to you about was—well, the other day," Marianne began with something in her tone of voice that I read as embarrassment.

"What other day?" I asked, frankly confused for the moment.

A trifle vexed, she said: "I mean when you had a drink

here the other afternoon and I passed on all that ridiculous loathsome gossip."

"Oh, *that*!" I was ready to dismiss it.

"What I mean to say is just that you made me feel horribly ashamed of myself. I suppose that's exactly what you intended, wasn't it?"

"Well—not exactly."

She made a small gesture with her hand to show that I didn't have to go easy with her. "Let's say then that you disapproved. And you were quite right. I've thought about it and seen it from your point of view. I want to apologize."

I laughed uneasily. "Now you're embarrassing me. I hate you to think I was judging——"

"No, for Heaven's sake, don't back down now!" she said insistently. "I was enjoying it, that's what I find so frightful. I enjoyed thinking I had something to tell you and then you were so angry. Oh, but you were—and you were right, too. . . . Gossip is only a habit and it's one that I despise in other people. Even that woman in Rapallo that started this whole tale. I thought she was detestable. And yet we all loved hearing it, and then I stored it up like a squirrel until I could get back to London to tell you about it."

"But—unhappily—we all do that," I said. I couldn't be anything but banal just then. For one thing, she'd taken me by surprise; I hadn't realized she was so sensitive. And anyway, having registered my opinion, I had no particular wish to gloat over her discomfiture. Certainly I had disapproved, and had nearly thought I would never like Marianne again. It was enough of a victory now to know that I could.

"All right then," she said. "I've been wanting you to know. I hated myself and that's pretty depressing. But why is it so hard to apologize? You know, I had to think and think about it, and form phrases in my mind. I knew that if I didn't do it to-night I'd be careless and just let it go."

"But you didn't."

She smiled again. "Thanks so much for understanding. Oh, and thank you, too, for being angry the other day. I needed that. . . . Now I've got to go back."

We rose together and I said: "Why do you have to work so hard at this kind of thing? Or do you enjoy it?"

"Of course I enjoy it. After all I'm my father's child. And besides—do you suppose I'll ever do anything as exciting as Daddy? Of course not, I'm not spectacular. So I have to enjoy it second-hand."

We started down the steps, but she turned back to me. She said: "Do you like David?"

I was utterly surprised. "Oh, very much!" I said.

"I'm glad. He likes you."

Then we went down. The singing had mercifully stopped. Now there was a young man at the piano who played show-tunes with a bouncing rhythm, and sang softly but seriously to himself. The people near the piano all appeared to have their backs to him.

The bar seemed the best place to stay when Marianne left me. I was alone only for a minute, though, before Victor Widgett bore down on me.

"I didn't see you at the theatre," I said.

"Wasn't there." He leaned towards me confidentially. "You don't think I'd sit through a Croyden play willingly, do you?"

"Why are you here now, then?"

"Marianne only invited me to the party. Nothing was ever said about the theatre."

"You're here under false pretences," I said.

"But I know you won't give me away," he said confidently. "And anyway I've already passed the reception line. Oh, I must tell you. I shook Croyden's paw and murmured sweet nothings at him about the play, the occasion, and that. And he drew me aside as if I were an old boy or something and told me about his daughter and David Basking."

"What did he tell you?"

"Incredible ! It was just as if he was throwing discretion to the winds. By George, I'm not an old confidant of the family—and I don't *want* to be !"

I asked him again what Croyden had said.

"I assumed the engagement notice is about to be sent to *The Times*. . . . You know, he'd never have breathed it to a soul except he's so carried away to-night. I suppose the best of us fail some time—and look just as silly. D'you think he trusts me to keep it secret ?"

"Surely he knows you better than that," I said. "But then I'm not so sure. You were pretty good at keeping this Nordale business secret."

He changed his expression at that and said : "Nordale business ? What Nordale business ?"

"Isn't there a show in the works ?"

"Now who told you that ?"

I laughed at his evasiveness. "Nordale himself," I said. "Saw him a couple of weeks ago in Paris. Why should it be a secret, anyway ?"

"Oh, well—it's just that while these things are in negotiation it's best not to have it bruited all about. But I guess it doesn't matter much any more."

"It's set ?"

"Quite. Second week in December. In fact, I just got Nordale's okay yesterday. Funny you should happen to mention it."

"Well, have another drink," I said, "and we'll toast the show."

"You mean Nordale's, I hope, because, bless me, I won't toast *this* one."

"Sounds to me as if you're just bitter. Don't you know about forgiving and forgetting ? Let's have more of that Christian spirit. You'll get over ~~Mar~~ Marianne once you get to Bennington."

"That's all off !" he exclaimed. "I couldn't face it. Too much I'd miss here and anyway—you didn't make those

American girls sound attractive enough." He had been edging towards the bar but hadn't quite gotten there yet.

"That's too bad," I said. "And there's another thing I've been meaning to say to you."

"Just give me a chance to get a drink."

"Hold on a second ! It's a bit of biographical misinformation you gave me about Nordale. The man *is* married."

"Is he ? Oh well, what difference does it make ?" He moved out of earshot and gave his order to the barman.

I decided not to wait for him. I wanted to see Winky. After pushing my way into the other room, I saw Croyden and Kenneth Ware and Winky standing together, surrounded by an assortment of guests. I had expected to see Basking with Winky, but he was not part of that group. At first it appeared that he was not in that room at all ; but then I caught sight of his glasses and discovered he was talking to a man whom I identified at once as my little friend Avery Munce.

It made me laugh to see him there, but it didn't seem unnatural.

By then I was expanding a little as a result of the whisky, so I made straight for him and said something about Rome and the movies. He did me the honour of placing me right off.

"Hey, this is swell !" he said. "My first day in London and all I do is run into everybody I know."

Basking said : "I find that Mr. Munce knows a renegade cousin of mine."

"Oh, Teddy's a solid citizen," Munce said boisterously. "We had lots of laughs together in Tropez. I was staying with the Whitlocks—you must know them, kind of nice people, Freddy and Fern."

"No, I'm afraid I don't," said Basking, almost apologetically.

"Anyway, they sort of know just about everybody, including your cousin Teddy. We used to whoop it up every now and then. Lots of laughs."

"It sounds like fun," I said. "But what about your job?"

"Job—shmob. The peacocks they got me. . . . You know bull-fighting? Well, that's sort of how they worked on me. First the capes, then the picadors. I give them a run for their money but by now I'm panting and then the banderilleros start dancing around me. It's all sort of delicate and I'm stuck—but good! The blood's running. I'm ready for the kill. They got me, I tell you, the sword went in right up to the damn hilt. So I got out of Rome, the climate was sort of disagreeing with me. Some girl they call Daisy Miller got a case of malaria sitting around the Coliseum so I decided it was time to pffft.

"Spent a week in Tropez with these here Whitlocks I mentioned and then some other people I met there were going to Spain so I sashayed along. It was sensational! In Madrid we ran into Beverly de Pinna and that whole crowd of pimps and floozies she hangs around with. We had a ball, I'm telling you, drove down to Torremolinos for a couple days, scouted around there for a while—Gibraltar—back to Madrid. Really lived it up for a few weeks. Then I stopped in Paris for a week. I'm making time with a Goldwyn agent there—looks pretty good. While he's trying to work something out for me I thought what the hell, why not go to London and take in a couple shows, see the sights—you know."

"Yes," I said.

"But I never expected to run into anything like this March number. I got to do something about it! Hollywood's going to be after her only I want to get in on it first."

"What makes you think so?" I said.

"I got a call in for this guy in Paris, I want to get an offer out of him. That way I could do both of us a good turn, I mean her and me both. You probably don't realize what a beaut she is." He made gestures of inexpressibility with his small hands. "I mean in a show like this you don't get that

unless you're looking for it. Maybe she's dumb—who cares? What counts is the way she puts herself over."

"Don't you think she does?" I asked. "Put herself over."

"What do you think I'm talking about? I still wish this joker in Paris would answer his phone only he's probably out on the town. . . ."

I tried to catch Basking's eye, but he was engrossed with Muncie.

"Did you speak to her?" I asked Basking.

"Miss March? Oh, yes, but there were really too many people. I'd like to see her alone some time."

"You ain't just kidding," said Muncie. I wondered what made him so avid. "I want to talk to her, too, only I want to have something concrete in my hands when I do. Listen—they're going to be around her like flies."

"Who?"

"The movie crowd, who do you think? I already ran into a Paramount guy at the theatre, during the intermission I saw him. Used to hang around with him in Rome when he was out of work. He sure avoided me at the theatre though."

"Well, good luck to you," said Basking with a smile.

"I just wish that call would come through," said Muncie.

"These damned high-class executives, they're all the same! I'll bet he's on the town, but good!"

I was beginning to feel silly. I wondered why he expected that man to be sitting in his apartment or his hotel room, when there was Paris to investigate. In any case I didn't care whether or not little Avery got the offer he was looking for. In fact, I didn't like the sound of it at all. This was what would be happening to Winky all the time now: everyone would be badgering her and nibbling at her. She was about to become a property, not just an actress. This was the way I was going to be pushed out.

I felt silly enough to be rude to Avery Muncie, but at the

same time I was suddenly tired of the party, tired of being on the fringes.

I said to myself, It's time to go.

It must have been pretty abrupt, the way I left the two of them just then. I didn't care, I wanted to talk to Winky. I wanted to get away from the noise and the crowd. I pushed my way to where she was standing and when I could cut in I said : " What about going ? "

She looked like somebody else to me. No particular person—just not Winky. It was almost as if I'd made a mistake and spoken to a stranger.

But she put her hand on my arm and said okay, she was ready any time. And then she was my Winky again. I can remember it now very clearly—her personality slipping back into place for me.

Croyden must have taken this in, but he could hardly have been interested. He protested about Winky's leaving. It was her night, he said. But he didn't mean it. The night was his, entirely his. That was traditional. I wonder if his graciousness fooled anyone. It was only because everything had been so successful that he was able to say it was Winky's night. He was such a hypocrite. From his point of view, after all, she was only an instrument in his design.

I didn't congratulate him and I didn't slink away. I said simply good night and both of us—Winky and I—left.

It was perfectly dignified.

§ Twelve §

THINGS didn't work out after that the way I had expected them to. The changes I had waited for and been afraid of just didn't seem to happen. Winky was pretty smart about it: all her professional problems went into the hands of an agent, and none of that touched us at home. Our schedule was a little different, that's all. We never had dinner until about eleven, after the performance. On Saturdays, when I was free, we were separated most of the day. We went on having our usual pub lunches, even on matinee day. I rather think Winky was being very careful to keep things this way, to impress on me the normality of her life. There was absolutely no invasion of the flat. Once, when *Picture Post* wanted to take pictures of her at home, in 'her own London flat,' she said no, firmly and distinctly; they photographed her instead in various London locales, such as Madame Tussaud's, the Zoo in Regent's Park, and the like. It interested me to see how impersonal these candid articles turned out to be. I took Winky's word for it that they were good publicity.

She had no lack of publicity after the opening; her reviews made that inevitable. In the light of these reviews, I wondered how many people came to the theatre mainly to see her. I suppose it was a combination of her personal attraction and the Croyden 'name' that made the play a hit. For that's what it was: a resounding, smashing, solid hit—

playing to capacity from the very first. People coming from abroad knew about it before they arrived ; it was among the first plays asked for at the ticket agencies. The American rights were sold within a week, and there was even an understanding of sorts that Winky would do the play in New York.

She could have been the toast of the town, whatever that actually means. She did receive a constant flow of invitations, most of which she turned down. It was as if she had no intention of turning a professional success into a social one, although that would have been easy for her.

And the offers Avery Munce had predicted also arrived, though his was not among them. But Winky wasn't going to be rushed. Her agent was naturally anxious for some kind of deal ; he came to talk to her a couple of times at the theatre while she was dressing to go home. She would listen to him attentively, argue for a while,* and then ask what was the hurry. . . . Hurry ? He couldn't understand her attitude, he was all for striking while the iron was hot ; he knew from experience, he said, that interest dies away, there is always so much other talent on the market. Winky, however, wasn't sure of that. She'd had movie offers before, during her success in New York ; but the idea of making films didn't quite satisfy her. She preferred to do one thing at a time. He spread his arms in consternation ; he didn't like it. He probably calculated his percentage loss while she wasted time making up her mind.

What was most remarkable and touching in this period was how well Winky maintained her simplicity : I never once was afraid she'd be carried away by herself. She used to telephone her family every other week, and there was hardly anything special in these conversations. She tended to minimize the proportions of her success and talked instead about family, friends, how was the weather there, how was Dad's business, and that kind of thing. I listened to her, and laughed sometimes. She didn't mind.

I wonder why we didn't get married then. It occurred to me plenty of times and I daresay it did to her as well. I remember twice, at least, when I came terribly close to it. I would only have said, Come on, put on your hat and let's get a licence. That's the way I phrased it in my own mind, anyway. But always I was stopped by the certainty that sooner or later she *would* be swept away from me. It was in the books.

I suddenly understood that Hollywood palaver about conflict of careers. That conflict was immense between Winky and me—or so I saw it then. There was every chance that I would be recalled to Washington after another year. If Winky's play were still running, it would mean a separation for us. And after that—what? The only place she could be was New York or, if she gave in to continuing blandishments, Hollywood. I didn't see how we could ever hold on that way. Our being in London together was a simple accident, which we might never again be able to duplicate. I saw the conflict as insoluble, and so I made the mistake of never discussing it with her.

I didn't propose. I didn't tell her to come on and put on her hat. There was no licence or talk of a licence, no announcement, no wedding. We went on in the same way, growing more closely involved, taking each other increasingly for granted. And yet it never felt exactly right. I knew that was true at the time for myself. I only learned later about her.

I had almost forgotten about Nordale's show when Victor called me at the Embassy to invite me to the opening, 10th December, a week from then. He even agreed, reluctantly, that I could bring a guest.

"Will Nordale be here?" I asked.

"Just for the opening, I believe. Now don't forget, it's half-past four. Oh, I'll send round an invitation, anyway. You're *sure* you have to bring a guest?"

" Oh, definitely."

" There are going to be altogether too many people."

I couldn't ask him whether Lucy was coming ; I didn't suppose he'd know. As I hung up the phone and listened to my secretary's typewriter again, I realized that I hadn't seen Lucy for a very long time. The old interest—I had to confess it—had certainly weakened. I felt that it would be ' nice ' to see Lucy again, a plus rather than a minus value, but I hardly felt concerned about it. If she didn't come with Nordale, well then I could see her another time—probably in Paris. Except that if I went to Paris, I wanted to go with Winky and there wasn't much prospect of her having time off very soon.

Then, as I resumed my work, I decided that I *would* like Lucy to come with Nordale, for then Winky could meet her. I was even tempted to call Paris and see what the plan was. But then—no, it was much better not to phone or inquire or meddle. I was all for keeping life simple.

Winky, of course, asked at once whether Lucy would be there. " You promised me that I'd meet her," she said.

" She'll *probably* be there."

" You sound so casual about it."

" That's the way I feel."

She laughed, comfortably and freely. " You know what, honey ? I almost believe you."

" Well, it's true ; you'd better believe me."

Marianne and Basking were the first people we saw when we came in out of a cold dark afternoon. Though the announcement in *The Times* had not yet appeared, they were still always seen together. More and more their names were mentioned in the newspapers ; in general, the proper assumption was being made about them. Marianne continued to glow with that look of confidence and composure which had only recently grown on her. And Basking, who seemed quite oblivious of attention being paid to him, was

still warm, congenial, very calm and steadfast. He was one of the people Winky called a doll.

"Everyone must have come on time for once," said Marianne, for the crowd was fairly dense.

Winky said : " I've never been to a real honest-to-goodness affair like this. What do you do ? "

Basking answered her. " Oh, you look at the people, you look intelligently at the pictures as if you're going to buy at least one, though you're really not. You smoke, and if there's any drink going, of course, you drink. It's like a little party, that's all. Come along—I'll conduct you. If Marianne doesn't mind."

" Of course not, darling. I have company ; we'll just follow you."

They went ahead, and Marianne and I stood for a minute outside the crowd. It reminded me of the Croyden party, only there was much less room here. Very few people actually seemed to be looking at pictures ; mostly they talked. I suppose more or less the same people go to all gallery openings and so they're all old pals. Maybe they meet only in galleries and have to catch up with all that's gone on between openings. Anyway, it was certainly a talk-fest. There were cries of happy recognition, hullo and I say-s. An interplay took place between female baritone and male soprano voices—completely unmusical. All the abominably dressed ladies wore hats, some very large hats. The men were drab in their heavy winter suits, with only a few Edwardian dandies in their midst.

Marianne said : " Let's do look at a picture or two. I've never seen this man's work."

But the intrusion of people made it difficult to see the pictures. We kept being interrupted by several couples in high spirits who seemed to be playing tag. We did as well as we could in the first room, then collected a catalogue and went into the next room where we came upon Lucy standing apparently alone in the middle of the crowd.

Doing nothing in particular—perhaps talking to some anonymous person—but simply standing there, as she had been standing on the platform in the Gare St. Lazare the first time I ever saw her.

For the moment she looked to me exactly the same ; but then when that first moment passed, *not* exactly. I couldn't tell what it was, and anyway the impression had been only a flash. We approached her and when she saw us her smile broke out, her hands came up to meet us : " Oh," she said, " I've been looking for you."

" Isn't this wonderful ? " Marianne cried. " I'm so glad you came."

" I *had* to come ! Because I knew I'd see you two here and it's so cold and dismal in Paris. Gosh, I'm *so* glad to see you."

" And so are we," I said. " You haven't written or done anything at all to keep in touch. You know how long it's been ? "

" *Do* I ? And I was absolutely sick about missing you when you came to Paris. That was August, wasn't it ? Oh, dear, the time has gone so fast, so *fast* ! "

It was really impossible to talk intelligently in that throng. Just to keep our positions respective to each other was an effort.

" Where are you staying ? " said Marianne. " You must come and stay with us."

" Oh, no, we're planning to go back to-morrow."

" But you *mustn't* ! " Marianne shouted. " Mummy and Daddy want to see you. It's not fair, Lucy."

" I don't see how— Anyway, can't we all have dinner together after this or something ? I don't know what Daniel has to do." She looked around the room, as if she would ask him just then if she could find him.

" Let us meet, anyway," said Marianne. " What about a drink at the Berkeley. About half-past eight. Can you remember that ? "

" Yes, I'll remember it. And then we can talk."

They began to say the sort of things women do say about each other's looks and clothes ; I let myself be pushed away to another part of the room. I wanted a vantage-point from which to look out for Victor or Nordale, or even just Basking and Winky. But there was no such thing in that room as a vantage-point. I decided to see as much of the paintings as I could, since that was the purpose of the occasion. It wasn't very successful. For me, at least, it was impossible to cut myself off from the crowd sufficiently to concentrate. I got only quick superficial impressions of very light bright colours, a couple of excellent abstracts and a series of fantasies, such as Victor had once tried to describe to me. The thing that struck me most, even seeing the pictures under these circumstances, was how happy they all seemed to be. Frivolous would be the wrong word : but they were gay, ebullient, crammed with ideas and activity. The one canvas I had seen in Paris seemed to me, as I remembered it, sombre in comparison. I kept on telling myself that I must see all the pictures again, when it was quiet, when there would be leisure. There was too much variety for me to appreciate all at once.

I went, without lingering anywhere very long, from room to room, and finally found Winky and Basking, who were on their way back.

Basking was almost trembling with excitement. " These are extraordinary ! " he said to me. " I can't believe them. How does it happen I've never heard of him before ? I'm simply overcome ! "

Winky said dryly : " This is the way he's been carrying on ever since we started looking. Every picture he sees he wants to buy. "

" But it's true ! " Basking went on. " Surely this man is a major artist. I go to all these shows, you know, I buy here and there, but I've never been impressed this way by a single show—oh, outside of Picasso or Matisse. But that's the class he's in ! I'm sure of it. "

It was amusing to see his enthusiasm, for it was basically out of key. It made him seem extremely young, and yet it was something more than a childish exuberance. It was as if he had suddenly found an experience he had been searching for : a discovery that had seemed to him beyond possibility. And the disease of possession had infected him. He had to find Nordale, he had to buy. In the midst of that aimless and fundamentally decorous crowd, he was like a prophet on fire. For the handsome patrician young man that he was, it seemed an incongruous role.

He left us to go in search of someone who could give him information.

"You should have *heard* him," said Winky. "It's really wonderful that anyone can get that excited, isn't it?"

"Just like you and a good part. . . . How do you like the pictures yourself?" I asked.

"You really can't see them very well. Anyway, for some reason I don't react much to painting. I mean if it's there I like a painting and get used to it, but when it's something new, I never have much feeling."

"I think he's good, though," I said. "Our David may be right."

We walked again, as aimless as the crowd. The place had long since become filled with cigarette-smoke ; there seemed to be no room to breathe. I longed to be in the cold outdoors again.

Winky caught sight of Marianne before I did. She pointed her out to me, and then said : "Did Lucy come?"

"Yes, that's the one Marianne's talking to."

Winky stood on her toes to see better. "The one in black? Oh, she's really pretty, she is indeed. I had no idea."

"Come on—I'll introduce you."

"No, baby," she said. "I don't think I want to right now. Some other time. She's much prettier than I thought. And so fresh—I think I know what you meant when you used to talk about her."

I, too, was looking at Lucy, and again I had that feeling that something about her was changed. She seemed to me thinner, not quite as perfect a specimen as I had once thought her. And she was smoking—that was probably it! She hadn't smoked before, and—because it was new to me—I thought it didn't become her.

"She's going to have a drink with us at the Berkeley, a little later," I said. "But you'll be at the theatre."

"But you'll pick me up, anyway, won't you?" Winky said, rather quickly.

"Yes, of course I will. Oh—and there's Nordale, the man over there with the blond hair talking to that woman with the big green hat."

She looked at him, with greater appraisal than she had used on his pictures. She was clearly more interested in people. "He's not bad, you know," she said. "The mature type. He could be very attractive! I'll bet they make a very pretty picture together."

"You make a pretty picture alone," I said.

"Please! . . . Well, I'm going to work now, sweetie. Winnie Winkle the Breadwinner, remember her? It's close enough for me to walk, isn't it?"

"No—better get a taxi; I'll come down with you."

For once, I didn't like seeing Winky go off that way. It was actually a bit early for her to be going. All she would do was sit in her dressing-room; I wondered whether she would be lonely there. On the other hand, she quite often went early to the theatre. She was not one of those performers who could come tearing in at the last moment, shed her own and zip on her stage personality in a second, and face the audience while still catching her breath. She liked to be ready well ahead—to start blotting out the real world long before she slipped into Croyden's imaginary one.

The crowd in the gallery didn't begin to thin out until a half-hour later. By then Basking had settled on ten pictures that he definitely wanted to buy. He didn't rule out the

possibility of choosing more, but Marianne tried to calm him down and keep him within bounds—at any rate, *her* bounds. I thought she was annoyed with him ; perhaps even embarrassed. It was sad, in a way, that she couldn't enjoy his exhilaration, even if she couldn't share it. As it was, she sought to douse out his fire by being 'sensible', by urging discretion, prudence : the things he was least interested in at that point. If she had not been in love with him, I was quite sure she would have told him he was making a fool of himself. But it must have been somewhat touchy for her ; she was, in spite of herself, appearing cross, and that must have been the last thing she wanted. Her smile seemed very false.

Basking had bearded Nordale, borne down on him, and made his feelings known : his pleasure, his surprise, the itch he had now to know more about Nordale, and more, and more. I couldn't tell how seriously Nordale took him. I could see him smiling, nodding to the younger man. It was as if they had reversed their conventional places in life—Basking being tempestuous and volatile, Nordale tranquil, self-contained. Victor fortunately appeared, with his long and elegant leprechaun look ; he intervened suavely. A little later, when he and I had a minute alone, he said : " You know, the boy's *not* mad. First of all he's got excellent taste ; I've often heard that about him. He's got a beautiful little collection of his own, probably means to endow a room at the Tate or something like that. And why shouldn't this excite him ? First time I saw a group of Nordale's canvases I felt the same way, though I must say I didn't explode. . . .

" I wonder whether Marianne's holding him on too short a rein. She ought to know better. He's a proud boy, Basking is, and he's going to behave as he bloody well pleases."

" Anyway, he'll make your show a success for you," I said.

" That he will. But please don't call it *my* show ! I'm not supposed to have anything to do with it. You can understand that, can't you ? "

"I'll try, Victor."

I left shortly after that with Marianne and Basking. Lucy was to follow, with or without Nordale. We drove in our separate cars to the Berkeley through gloomy and forbidding Piccadilly.

By the time we met again in the hotel, I felt it was a safe bet that Marianne had spoken rather severely to Basking. They both looked cross now as we sat down in the lounge and ordered our drinks.

Basking's first remark had nothing to do with the show. Pointedly, I imagined. He said: "I forgot Isobel would be at the theatre. I expected to see her here."

"No, she left quite a while before we did," I said.

"How's she liking her first London winter?" He managed to go on like that for several minutes, and Marianne said nothing. It was anything but jolly; they both made me feel uncomfortable. It was as if they had not had enough time to finish their quarrel. I made an excuse to leave them alone for a short while, but when I got back it looked very much as if they had not spoken to each other at all during my absence.

Lucy's arrival was a blessing. ~~She~~ came not only with Nordale, but with Victor and another man, a stranger who was dressed in a suit of some foreign cut. This welcome intrusion cleared the atmosphere at once. Victor took Marianne in hand; Basking had Nordale to distract him; and I was very happy to have Lucy beside me. The extra man simply sat by himself—quite contentedly, it appeared.

"I'm so tired," Lucy groaned. "I've been up since about six-thirty this morning."

I couldn't understand why.

"Oh, there seemed to be so many things to do at the last minute. It's my own fault; I just don't know how to manage things the way other people do."

It was puzzling to me how the smoking changed her. I remembered the gentle way she had always said, No thanks

I don't smoke, with a rueful apologetic smile. I wondered why we should ever expect people to be the same after a long separation. How can they possibly stay the same, in a state of suspended animation, when every day away from us presents them with new experiences, new pressures, ideas, impulses? What I was regretting, I suppose, was not the changes themselves, or even simply the sense of change in Lucy, but the fact that I had had no part in them or witnessed them. And yet, I can see now, if I had had any part in these changes, I probably wouldn't have noticed them.

"Everybody's been so nice," she was saying. "The people at the gallery thought the response was much more enthusiastic than they expected it to be. They think the pictures will all be sold."

"Does that please Daniel?" I asked.

"He's kind of funny about that. Sometimes he says he doesn't care whether he ever sells another picture, because most of the people who buy them don't understand them anyway. But, of course, this'll mean quite a lot of money for us and you don't sneeze at that."

"No," I said, and after a moment: "How does Paris seem to you these days?"

She laughed and threw back her head. "Ever since I saw you and Marianne this afternoon I've been thinking about Paris. I don't mean *now* but when I first arrived there. You remember that day you both met me at the station and how excited I was and all I wanted to do? Well, you ought to see me now. All I worry about is plumbers and electricians and where to buy wine cheap—all that kind of thing."

"But isn't that fun for you?"

"In a way, I suppose it is, but I get a little tired of it sometimes. . . . And there are times when I feel I just hate all French people, they're so funny about money and the way they do things. They're always trying to take advantage and it's pretty easy with me, I guess. Daniel keeps on telling

me how I should deal with them, but then I don't follow his advice and they always cheat me anyway, I mean shop-people. I don't really care all that much, it's only—well, what I mean is it was different when I was just a tourist staying at the Lutétia. There were all those things I didn't know about then. You know—every now and then I go and sit myself down at the Deux Magots or anywhere over near St. Germain and I listen to the Americans talking about their problems. I get a big kick out of it ; and I realize I was exactly like some of them."

"But you're not unhappy ? " I said.

"Oh, *no* ! Sometimes I get homesick and wish I could just have a hot dog and soda but that doesn't amount to much. I'll tell you one thing that kind of riles me though"—she leaned closer to me—"and that's these big French families and the way they stick together. God, you wouldn't believe it ! Daniel must have about twenty aunts and uncles and *great*-aunts and cousins all there in Paris. And they have big houses and apartments practically in the same neighbourhood, and week in and week out, come hell or high water, he has to visit every single one of them right on schedule. I don't know how he can stand it."

I could see why this would bother her. It was no part of being swept off one's feet. If anything, it was anti-romantic, conventional, the sort of thing ordinary people did. Perhaps she would have been able to accept it if she were somehow included in it, but it was an activity that obviously left her out. Her easiest defence against it was to resent it.

"At home," she went on, "we see our relations as little as possible. In my family, anyway—it's kind of a joke. We say, Gosh we haven't seen Uncle Ben in over two months, and Mother says, I just couldn't *bear* it ! "

"What about your family ? " I asked. "How do they feel about your staying in Paris ? "

"Oh, that was easy ! I told them I decided to take some classes at the Sorbonne, that's what all the American kids in

Paris do. Actually I wouldn't mind going to some of the lectures, only I never seem to have any time."

She said these things lightly enough, even with a glint of amusement. She was not complaining, except perhaps about the isolated position she was put in by her relationship with Nordale. But while she told me about her life in Paris, I kept wondering why it sounded so tame. If only they hadn't set up house—for that was the aspect of it that seemed to me so deadening, so domesticated and connubial. It would stifle her to be embedded in that bourgeois Paris life; she was too easy-going for it, too free and personal.

But if it satisfied her, my impression didn't matter in the least.

Marianne broke away from Victor to say, "You are going to stay, aren't you, Lucy?"

Lucy shrugged her shoulders. "I'd like to. . . ." I had noticed the way she watched Nordale even as she spoke to me. Occasionally her look was almost an appeal, but he did not return it; Basking kept him very much absorbed. She addressed him now: "Daniel, what do you think?"

"Yes?"

"Marianne wants me to stay a little while with her."

"But, of course. Why not?"

"Oh, that's splendid!" said Marianne.

"I only wondered if you would mind," Lucy said to Daniel.

There was no chance for me to speak at all privately to Lucy after that, but I begged her to see me for a while the next night. If she stayed, she said, she would. I would have to check with Marianne the next day.

"But why did I have to go now?" she asked.

I told her I had to meet a friend, that anyway I would count on to-morrow. I could see Marianne looking at her watch when I rose to go: she would know as well as I what time the play ended. But she didn't say anything, and I'm sure she thought I hadn't noticed.

I left the Berkeley feeling confused. There had been too

many conversations going on at once, overlapping, diffusing one's attention. And who was the unknown man?

I'd hardly spoken to Nordale; he might have thought me stand-offish. I came away with an impression not entirely new to me: that this sort of social activity was very tiring and unsatisfactory. I did enough of it for my living; on my own time I preferred something else. Yet people were always saying, Let's all go have a drink somewhere, and it always sounded like a good idea—until one was *there*. Then one was captive, listening to conversations that never got finished, making promises one didn't want to keep.

At any rate this was the basis on which I tried to explain my dissatisfaction. In my cold car, driving through the cold streets, I felt that I wasted my life in trivial activities with trivial people. And yet I couldn't see what else there was. Every now and then my profession seemed to me a useful one; but this was not one of those times. I had a vague sense that important events took place all over the world and that I was not a part of them. The idea of waste left me discontented.

Winky was also out of sorts. When I came into the dressing-room she said: "Well—hello. I didn't really expect you to come for me."

"I told you I would."

"Yes, you're a good Bunny boy, aren't you? The dependable type."

Nettled, I said: "Why not come off it. I'm feeling kind of tired and I'm sure you must be, too."

"As a matter of fact, I'm not tired at all."

I sighed. "That's good. . . . Look, baby, let's just go home and eat and sit and be quiet."

"I feel quite lively. I feel like a party."

"Oh, hell!"

She looked at me and laughed. "You ought to see yourself! Oh, Bunny, it's not as bad as all that. I'm not going to fight with you, honest, I'm not. Cross my heart——"

" Well, why do you start that way ? "

" I don't know. Why can't I have my moods ? You came in here looking like A Streetcar Named Depression—what am I supposed to do ? "

I put my hands on her shoulders. " You know what I want ? "

" What ? "

" Just to be alone with you. No crowds, no strangers. I'm real satisfied."

" Okay. All you have to do is say nice things. Just sort of keep me informed, that's all. Sure, honey, let's go home."

§ Thirteen §

IT was about six the next evening when I picked Lucy up at Church Street. I led her automatically to my car, but she wondered whether it might not be more pleasant to walk a bit. It had been a clear icy day with gusts of wind and shuddering trees. Now it was dark as we walked towards the King's Road : the time of day when lights glow more deeply than usual and look warm. A sad time of day in a London winter.

Lucy wore a beaver coat, and walked with her hands in her pockets.

"I love walking in this kind of weather," she said. "I would have gone out during the day only I was afraid of getting lost. Marianne's been busy all afternoon—and London seems gigantic."

"Has Daniel gone back to Paris?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, quite early this morning. I took him to the station and then just got a taxi here. You know, I really can't stay very long, I haven't anything to wear."

"That's a terrible problem," I said. "We'll have to put you on a train right away."

"Oh, men never understand!"

We turned into the King's Road and started towards Sloane Square. The buses came streaming by in both directions, beautifully manoeuvred in that narrow street. All the people we passed on the pavement must have been returning

from offices and shops in other parts of the city. Impatient to be home and warm, they walked fast while we strolled and stopped at shop-windows. Our leisure must have been a mystery to those people.

"You know what I was thinking about before you came?" said Lucy. "That stupid trip to Antibes——"

"When I missed you."

"Yes. I didn't want to go a bit. But Daniel kept persuading me that I mustn't stay in Paris during August, I needed a vacation, and all that. Daniel thought I was too tired or something. I hate it when people tell you you ought to go away for a rest and then everything will be all right. I suppose I *was* getting a little touchy about some things. I never have before, I've always been terribly healthy and good-tempered, so maybe if something really was wrong with me I wouldn't know it. But I didn't want to go away one little bit, I really didn't. And then everything went wrong anyway. I hated the place where I was staying, and I hated Antibes. I was so lonely that I didn't know what to do with myself. And while I was away Daniel's mother got sick with some kind of dysentery, it was real serious and he was practically going out of his mind and all the time he didn't write a word about it, of course. Oh, it was a lovely trip all around and then I get home to find out you had been in Paris. I was so *mad*!"

"Did Mme Brunot tell you I saw her?"

"Yes, she did. I'm glad you know her because I think she's such a swell person. You know she's the only person I know in Paris that I can really talk to. Sometimes I feel so out of place there; I get to feel as if I don't belong there at all and there's some big mistake somewhere—well, that's when I go to see her. She's always so comfortable, and at least you know *she* belongs there!"

"I liked her," I said.

"Oh, everybody does. And, you know, she's really awful sharp, she always knows what's going on."

"And what is going on?" I asked.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean you."

"Oh—there's nothing going on. I don't know what you mean."

"I guess I just meant are you satisfied with it all, are you glad you stayed in Paris?"

She didn't answer at once. I had the impression that she was turning something over in her mind, looking at her life, perhaps, from a suddenly new perspective. When she spoke it was as if she had decided just then what she wanted to say.

"No, I guess I can't honestly say I'm satisfied," she began. "In fact every now and then I'm just plain miserable. The funny thing is I don't know why. I guess the real trouble is that I don't know what I was expecting, what I thought it would be like. Don't get the wrong idea—Daniel's a wonderful person and he really tries to make me happy. Really he does. It's terribly sweet the way he worries about me and tries to do the right thing all the time. But, you know, I think I must be an awfully annoying person to live with. I never realized it before."

"What makes you think so now?"

"Just because he gets so angry with me sometimes. And he's right, I really think he is. You see, he's the kind of person who thinks things out and gets them done in a hurry; everything he does he does very quickly. And I'm just not built that way. I just sort of plunge in, thinking about all sorts of other things; I never know how I'm going to do anything until I'm doing it. It drives him wild! And then I'm just slower than he is. He always has to wait for me—that really annoys him, and no matter what I do it always works out that way. I simply don't *think* the way he does. And he always has to explain things to me again and again. It makes me feel like a child and then I don't like that. . . . Oh, it's not as simple as that. Maybe it's because he's older

or because he's not American or something. But sometimes I feel we're just too different."

"Would you feel the same way if you were married?" I asked.

She looked at me in an odd way, but I couldn't make out whether she felt I had said too much.

"I don't know," she said simply. Then added with a shade of bitterness: "I think it's one of the things I'll never forgive his mother for. That, and the way she ignores me. . . . But, honestly, I don't know whether being married would make so much difference. At least over here I don't think so, and anyway he's never going to go to the States, I'm sure of that. But why are we talking about me? Tell me something about yourself!"

"Oh, that would be dull!" I laughed. "The reason I ask about you is that I have a little feeling of responsibility about you."

"But that's silly!"

"After all, I told you to take the chance when we were in Rome that time."

"No, you didn't really. I would have done it anyway because I really wanted to. You know that I was trying to run away from him but it wouldn't have worked. I love him, you know—I still do. But I'm not sure whether that's enough. Isn't that funny? I thought all you had to do was fall in love. . . . It's so peculiar, though, because I feel as if I don't mean *enough* to him even though I know how much he cares for me. I feel sad about it as if I'm a disappointment to him. . . . You know, I almost made up my mind a couple of weeks ago to leave him."

"But why?"

"It just seemed such a struggle! He got angry with me about something I did or said—I can't even remember now what it was. Anyway, for once, I answered him back, I cried, I screamed, oh, I did everything! And then the whole business made me feel so sad I thought I'd better end it. I

was so damned tired of it all—all the shopping and cooking and keeping house. I *hate* it ! And that's another silly thing, I keep on getting this money from home but he won't let me use it. He's so old-fashioned about that sort of thing. I could have a maid if he'd let me use the money, but he won't. So now I have an account at the Chase Bank in Paris and I just keep on depositing my allowance. . . . Why should that money bother him ? ”

“ Oh well,” I said, “ he wants to support you himself. I can understand that.”

“ Well, I *can't*. I don't understand it at all. One of the main reasons he agreed to this show here was on account of me. He didn't want to do it really, but he knew he'd make some money out of it—for *me*. You think I'm happy about that ? But he knows it makes me unhappy to scrape and do all that work. I wouldn't mind it if I *had* to, but I don't. I feel as if I put up with a whole lot of things like his mother and all that family business, but when it comes to something like this money, something I want, something I could contribute, well, then he just won't see it my way.”

I was thinking again of the other Lucy, the first Lucy who had been full of the freedom to do whatever she wanted. I thought of all the things that had amused her—even being robbed of her money had seemed a laughing matter then. This was probably what I had seen as a change in her the day before—that there were no longer such good jokes. Her life didn't make such a good story for her any more.

“ I'm sorry about it,” I said.

“ Oh, please *don't* be sorry ! It sounds awful when I talk this way, I know. But I really think he's wonderful, there are so many things that make me happy. I'm sure everybody goes through this sort of thing. For instance, I've gotten to know an American couple that are living in Paris for a year and they do nothing but fight all the time even when I'm with them. Honestly, after an evening with them I'm so thankful to get back to Daniel. I feel so lucky to have him.”

"But he's lucky to have you," I said.

She pondered over this for a moment. "I don't know how lucky he is. I feel as if I get in his way. He's used to having his own life and then I come in and expect him to think about me all the time. Sometimes I think my family must have spoiled me, I just want too much."

After a minute I said: "There's something I'd like to say to you if you promise not to mind."

"What?"

"I just wanted to point out to you, Lucy, how young you are. Don't you think that by the time you're my age you'll look back on these things and find them a little strange and wonder why this or that upset you?"

"I don't know," she said very seriously. "Does it all change that much?"

I had to laugh. "It's not that anything changes that much. No, it's just that the passing of time is absolutely inevitable, you can't do a single thing about it, and when you have had some years behind you, everything in the past has a different look. I may be just as silly now as I was at twenty-two, but I must say some of the things I did then seem pretty funny to me when I think about them. Mostly the things I worried about. . . . It's kind of a comfort."

"Well, *that's* something, anyway," she said, smiling. But I didn't suppose she cared much for the idea of waiting some ten years before she had her comfort. At best that idea might provide her with an intellectual satisfaction, but what use was that to her now? I suddenly saw that, in a sense, Daniel had become an intrusion upon her happiness. If, before she had met him, she had been aware of longings, no matter how romantic, at least she had been able to feel that anything might be possible, she was faced with nothing but potentialities. Now that feeling was cut off, and the longings, supposedly fulfilled, continued—perhaps in some different form, perhaps no longer so romantic, but nevertheless urgent and real.

We were standing now momentarily suspended in Sloane Square, and I thought of the little talk I had had with Victor, months ago, about the American girl. It was unfortunate for Lucy that she had fallen outside the pattern. If she had gone on within the accepted formula built up for her, if she had been receptive to one of those ordinary 'fellows' at home, married and built a house with all its American appurtenances, and taken her natural, undisturbing place within the country-club life that was a set-up for her, she might never have come face to face with this problem of disillusionment and unfulfilment. There were, I felt, other kinds of American girls who could have coped with Lucy's situation ; more intelligent or gifted or inquisitive or imaginative girls. But Lucy, for all her quality, was too ordinary even to understand what she faced—and consequently she was more affected by it.

I didn't want to hear any more about it. I suggested a drink at the Antelope nearby, and once there we talked about impersonal things. She wanted to do some sight-seeing, wanted to take a short trip outside London ; Marianne had already made some suggestions. She asked about the Croydens, and shouldn't she see the play ?

By all means, I said ; I would take her. And then afterwards, perhaps, I could ask some people around to my flat.

The idea of an informal little party pleased her ; perhaps she thought it would be like home.

So I saw the play again the next night, and I was not surprised by being bored again. But Lucy was thrilled. Knowing the author gave her a special excitement, an extra sense of participation and proximity. I could understand that, especially since the play came to her as something new and personal and unexpected. I was able even to cap that excitement by promising her that Winky, whom she so much admired during the first act, would come to my party.

In the theatre I had plenty of attention to spare for Lucy ; she was as intense as she had been that first day in Paris, riding in the taxi and trying to see everything at once. She

was the ideal spectator, reacting without fail to everything that happened on the stage. She was not suspended, as I was, between the actual and the imaginary ; the rising of the curtain transferred her at once out of her own life into the other one created there on the stage. She was unaware of the mechanics of the performance : the stage-hands, the lighting technicians, the false fireplace, and the fake greenery that was meant to suggest a garden beyond the window. Her sensibilities appeared to be entirely engaged, no element of the real world leaked into the theatre for her, and she was as uncritical as a child.

I realized that this was her characteristic manner, her native attitude towards life—to be almost entirely indiscriminating, to accept and enjoy everything, so long as she was left free and unencumbered. But above all to enjoy, to have fun. Since she lacked basic anxieties, she always expected the best to happen—unlike those fretful people, played upon by the disruptions of modern life, who expect trains to be late, or planes to crash, or people to be cruel and selfish. Perhaps that was one of the reasons why she felt no urge to hurry or be efficient, why she couldn't understand the pressures and compulsions that were normal in Nordale's life. In her own personal appreciation of life she was a dilettante ; she dawdled, tasted, relaxed, with all the time in the world at her disposal.

It suddenly seemed to me all wrong that she should have to adapt herself to another, and much more usual, way of life. It was like a shoe that would never fit her properly. If she adapted successfully, it would be at a cost : she would have to lose her gift for undisturbed leisure. And if she didn't adapt, she would never again be happy.

In deciding whom I should ask to my gathering, I had not been very original. Marianne and Basking, of course, were invited—as well as Victor. If I had known whether Avery Munce was still in town, I would have asked him too, for

surprise-value. But I had not run into him again since Croyden's party : London is one of those places where one doesn't tend to meet one's friends accidentally. As an extra pair, I had asked an Embassy couple, the Philbys, who were quite run-of-the-mill, but sometimes entertaining people.

Lucy took to the Philbys at once. Partly, it was because she seemed to be starved for Americans ; but also because they were familiar with the Maine coast, where Lucy and her family generally spent their summers.

Winky, who had not been too enthusiastic about the idea of asking people in at all, gazed at Lucy talking excitedly with the Philbys and muttered to me : " Old home week." On the whole, though, she put on a pretty good show, talking mainly to Basking and keeping track of empty glasses whenever I became too involved with Marianne or Victor. In fact, though there was no reason to compare them, she behaved much better than Lucy, who seemed to develop an obsession about the Philbys. Maybe it was only because they were the kind of people she had not been with for a long time. I felt once or twice that her unexpected intensity and rather nervous animation were beginning to make the Philbys uncomfortable. I knew that they had wanted to meet Winky, but Lucy was preventing them.

After watching them for a while, I made an attempt to break in, but without much success. Lucy simply pulled me down beside her on the couch and said : " You know your friends used to stay in a house right down the street from us in Booth Bay Harbor ! Isn't that odd ? I'll bet I've seen them hundreds of times ! "

Rita Philby explained that they'd actually spent only two weeks many summers ago in that particular house and really liked other parts of Maine better. But Lucy wouldn't relinquish the wonder of it : she insisted they must have passed right in front of her windows countless times. And then described her family's house again ; surely they must remember it ?

"As a matter of fact," Rita laughed, "our two kids got mumps when we were there and I can't remember whether I *ever* stepped out of the house. It was a stinking summer, that's all I remember. Talk about rain! It was worse than the tropics. Remember the way it rained, Jay?"

"Must have rained two and a half feet the two weeks we were there," said her husband.

"Oh, but it's so *lovely* there!" cried Lucy. "I love it even when it rains."

"Not with two kids in bed with the mumps you wouldn't," Rita said rather sourly.

"I had whooping cough one summer we were in Booth Bay Harbor," said Lucy, "when I was twelve. Gosh, it's funny to think about it. . . ."

Mrs. Twigg had prepared an impressive table of cold foods; she was all for showing off whenever I entertained. Winky and I got coffee ready and hoped to break things up a bit by asking people to eat. In the kitchen Winky said: "She's a sweet enough kid but what's she so excited about?"

"I guess she just doesn't get to see many Americans in Paris."

"Why not? I thought that's all there were in Paris—Americans."

"Big joke," I said. "Don't forget she's leading a French life."

"That's what she wanted, isn't it? And what's wrong with Marianne? She's real fishface to-night. You think maybe she can't hook him or something?"

"Maybe. I wouldn't say he's the easiest thing in the world to hook, anyway."

"Like you," she said laughing, and carried out the coffee.

Victor, at least, was anxious to eat. He stood deliberating at the table and made up his mind to have a large helping of everything. With a look of glee on his face he said, "Tell me, is this a typically American way of having supper?"

"Oh, no," said Winky. "At home we'd always have everything served by footmen with white wigs."

Victor looked around to me for help. "Did I say the wrong thing?" he asked.

"Not wrong," said Winky. "I just thought it had a nice rude sound."

I said: "Victor could never be rude intentionally. These things just pop out accidentally. But that reminds me, Victor—you won't be happy without a wine. I'll see what I can find for you."

"Why spoil him?" Winky said.

Marianne delicately refused food, but said finally that a cup of coffee might be a good idea on such a cold night. I could see what Winky had meant: Marianne was definitely looking gloomy even though she tried to cover it up with embarrassing smiles. Basking, on the other hand, was especially cheerful. He balanced a plate of food on his knee and made it appear as if he never ate any other way.

The Philbys, after filling their plates, sat next to Marianne, leaving Lucy isolated. When I asked her whether she wanted to eat, she said no, she wasn't a bit hungry. Maybe later. She made it sound as if she were quite satisfied, quite happy, but she looked restless. I saw her leave the couch and wander slowly around the room. At the window she stopped and pulled the curtains apart far enough to look out into the street. Victor was telling some fantastic tale or other; he held everyone's attention.

I went up to Lucy and asked her what she was thinking about.

She turned to me with her smile. "I'm sorry," she said. "I guess I was pretty far away. I was thinking about Daniel. You know, I miss him."

"But you've only been separated two days."

"I know, it's silly as anything. But I'm dying to know what he's doing right now and honestly I wish I were with him. I shouldn't have stayed in London."

"But, Lucy," I said, "you can't lead your life that way. You can't be so dependent."

"I was wondering if I ought to phone him."

"Why not? Do it here. The phone's in my bedroom; you can go in there alone."

She turned her face away from me. "No, I don't think I will. . . . Oh, it's so awful! You know why I don't want to call? Because I'm afraid. After all this time I don't think I'd know what to say to him. And then that would make him mad and——"

"You go in there and call him," I said. "Right now."

She laughed appealingly. "It's funny the way whenever I see you you're making me do something I really want to do. It's a great help."

"Now don't start blaming things on me just to make yourself feel better. It's no skin off my back. If you want to call him the phone's all yours, if not——"

"No, I'll call him," she said. "Only I'll need another drink and then I want you to put the call through. I always have such a terrible time with operators."

Although I thought she was acting like a child, I took her glass and filled it again. Then, holding her hand, I led her into the bedroom, asked for the number, and began negotiating with the operator—a young man with a refined Cockney accent, who spoke excellent French.

At my elbow, Lucy said, "Oh, it's so silly!" I told her to shut up and she giggled.

I felt a little less cavalier about the whole idea when it became evident that no one would answer. The operator asked whether he should try again later.

I asked Lucy.

"What do you mean?" she said. "He's not there?"

"You hit it on the nose. Shall I tell them to put it through again in half an hour?"

"But why isn't he there?"

"Look, Lucy, we can go into all that later. Right now I want to know what to tell this man."

She looked at me rather harshly, as if I were forcing her

into some position that was uncomfortable for her. "No," she said, "I don't want them to try again. Cancel it. I don't want to talk to him now."

When I had finished with the operator, she said: "I just don't understand why he's not home. What time is it?"

"About midnight."

"But where could he be at midnight?"

"He could be just sitting at a café or having a walk or visiting friends. You're not going to start imagining all kinds of unnecessary things?"

She wasn't really listening to me, I realized. "He was probably delighted when I stayed here. That's why he agreed so quickly."

I was feeling quite exasperated. I said: "Oh, of course, and he's probably tired of you already and has somebody else on the string and you can begin eating yourself up with jealousy."

"Is that what you think?"

I sat down with her on the bed and held her hand. "Look," I said, "I don't believe that for a second and I hope to heaven you don't either. I don't like seeing you this way, Lucy. It doesn't make any sense and it's absolutely unnecessary. It's also rather stupid. So why don't you drink some of this whisky instead of just holding it, and come out and talk to the others?"

Her face remained composed and expressionless. What I missed suddenly was her smile, her almost ungovernable smile. She said nothing, but lifted her glass and drank from it.

Then all at once she started to giggle. "You know somebody else once called me stupid," she said. "Know what I did? I slapped him."

"Well, you can slap me if you want to."

"I'm getting so I believe it's true. We can't all be bright, can we? Okay—let's go in to the others; I don't want to spoil your party when you're so understanding and patient

with me. I should have fallen in love with you instead of Daniel, that would have made things a whole lot easier. I'd never be afraid of you."

"And I can't see any reason why you should be afraid of Daniel," I said. "How can you be afraid of somebody you love? I'm sure that's not the word you mean."

"Oh, yes, it is. But why should you understand that? I'd hate you if you did. I hate people who understand everything. . . . Come on, let's go in there and I'll flirt with the duke or whatever he is. I'll steal him away from Marianne."

She came back with me then, apparently determined to be gay and demonstrative. She made straight for Basking, breaking into a conversation he was having with Winky, and asked him if he'd fix her a drink. He was not the man to look confused or hesitate; smiling, he rose at once and nodded an unspoken excuse to Winky.

As I stood for a moment watching this from the doorway, my party seemed to me a paltry thing. Not enough people, I decided—forgetting that I always preferred small gatherings. And yet, unsatisfactory as it looked to me, the party was approaching that point, which occurs in every party, when a kind of loosening takes place. The preliminaries were over, everyone had had his second drink, an element of folly had thrust its way in. Philby was telling old jokes. Victor was on the floor demonstrating an exercise guaranteed to make tall people shorter. Marianne was laughing with her mouth wide open.

I said to Winky: "Hi, baby, are you happy?"

"Mm. . . ." She inclined her head. "Not bad, not bad. And how's little Miss Muffet?"

"Who?"

"The little one that makes you get those big sad eyes. Lucy."

"Sad eyes?" I said.

"I'll show you some time—for kicks. I've been studying the expression."

I shrugged my shoulders. "Okay, you show me. But she's not in very good shape. We just had a little scene in the bedroom."

"Did you attack her, you big bad man?"

I looked at her with surprise. "You really are on a kind of kick to-night, aren't you?"

She laughed. "You better watch your language, honey; you're starting to sound like me. . . . You know, you're too easy to tease, it's no fun."

"I guess not because it starts worrying me after a little while."

"I know, sweetheart. You get so serious and puzzled. I love that look, it makes you look real young. And then I think of you in that office of yours and I wonder whether you look that way there, too. Do you?"

"I hope not."

Rita came over to us and said: "Did you hear about our new baby-sitter? She's sixty-five if she's a minute and a nose like Cyrano. Honestly—I almost died laughing after she came the first time. But the funny thing is she dresses in all sorts of frilly things and makes herself up like silly. The kids absolutely love her and her name is Angelica Risborough."

"You're making it up," said Winky.

"Honestly—cross my heart and hope to die!" Rita shrieked.

Victor joined us abruptly. "Who hopes to die?"

"I was just explaining——" Rita started, but I lost track of what she was saying, for I noticed that Lucy had left the room with Basking. Marianne, I could see, had also noticed; Jay was speaking to her but he might just as well have saved his breath. After a minute she got up from where she was sitting and stood without any apparent purpose by the table, which now looked dishevelled, with left-over food and empty plates.

Victor was saying: "All the nannies I've ever known had *huge noses*."

"Oh, but Miss Risborough isn't a nanny," said Rita. "She's only a respectable spinster lady who happens to love children."

Marianne made a decision and left the room while Victor said: "Those are the kind to beware of! They go around pinching children."

"You mean kidnapping?"

"Heavens no, dear woman. I mean pinching—like this!" He gave her a good sample on her forearm. Rita shrieked again.

And then I heard Lucy's voice, loud and unsteady, from the bedroom. I couldn't tell what she was saying. After a minute she started to cry.

I said to myself, Here we go—the party incident. With all the trimmings.

Winky caught my eye and rose, but I went ahead of her. Marianne met me in the hallway. With perfect control and not a flicker of emotion, she said: "I think I'd better take Lucy home. Apparently she's had too much to drink."

Basking came up behind her; his face, too, was a perfect mask.

I went past them into the bedroom. Lucy was sitting on the bed and crying, but not very seriously.

"What's wrong?" I said.

She looked up at me and broke into a laugh. "I told you I'd flirt with him."

There was hardly anything I could say. All I know is that I wanted them all out of the house: a selfish reaction, I suppose, but probably a fairly natural one, too.

I said: "Maybe you'd better go now. Marianne's getting ready."

"I don't want to go now. Don't want to go at all."

"But Marianne's going."

"Good for her. Good for Marianne!—I can stay here, can't I?"

"No, not very well," I said.

Winky came into the room and asked : " How're you doing, baby ? "

Lucy said, " He's doing fine. Why do you call him baby ? He's a big man now, he's going to take care of me. He's going to——"

" I'll get your coat," I said, and as I went down the hall I heard her saying, " I don't want to go."

Basking came up to me as I looked for Lucy's coat in the closet. He said : " I think Marianne and I can get her down to the car together. It was really quite startling the way she tossed off a tumbler of whisky and then said she had to telephone somebody. That's why——"

I interrupted him. " Yes, I'll just take her coat in and get her started."

Winky was very efficient at managing Lucy. It was she who got Lucy on her feet and put on her coat. Talking to her in a girl-to-girl way, Winky helped her to walk. And then Marianne and Basking took over.

I don't know whether Victor or the Philbys ever knew precisely what had happened. I don't suppose, though, that Victor ever missed much. In any case he never said anything about it ; but when those two had left with their reluctant burden he took that as a signal to leave himself.

So the party broke up very abruptly. Rita Philby looked about her with an expression of surprise, as if to say, But I've just started having fun. Although I asked them to stay, they all prepared to go.

At the end, Victor did something very peculiar. He asked Winky if he could see her home.

She said no, she wasn't going just yet.

I could almost see Victor filing that away in his memory. I wondered when he would see fit to bring it up.

§ Fourteen §

IT wasn't until April of the following year—four months later—that I heard any more of Lucy. As far as I was concerned, she simply disappeared after my party ; Marianne told me later, in passing, that Lucy had gone back to Paris the next day. But Marianne showed a clear disinclination to talk about Lucy, and I had no mail from Paris. So I was without information.

That was just as well. Those four months added up to a curiously static period. Changes must have been taking place but they remained unnoticed. My work seemed to go along at a regular pace ; so regular that it occasionally seemed dreadfully routine and made me long for some unforeseen variation—any kind of crisis or disaster. As far as my responsibilities went, the change in the government at Whitehall had made practically no difference in my work ; I saw some new officials, but that was all. I felt embedded in a bureaucratic machine of corridors and offices ; even the pneumatic-drill persistence of typewriter-sounds was like the noise this machine made in its perpetual operation.

This sense of stasis, of moving nowhere, of developing nothing, also pervaded my relationship with Winky. She herself was beginning to be bored with her work. She worried about the length of the play's run. There was no sign at the box office of flagging interest, and she wondered whether she would be able to stick it out for a year. She

felt that she was not performing well. The more experienced members of the cast knew better than she how to simulate freshness, how to react to each new audience as if the play were really re-created each evening when the curtain rose. But Winky found herself losing vigour ; she felt that too many of her performances were automatic and insensitive. It made her worry about herself as an actress ; if she were unable ever to endure a long run, she might just as well give up. Or so she said whenever she was at her lowest.

So we were both of us feeling dull as we watched for spring. Dull in ourselves and dull together. We drove out of London on Sundays into the lush countryside as if we were seeking something to refresh us—not a magic river or forest, but an *experience*. Occasionally, in some inn, we thought we felt an old sense of the excitement of life bubbling up again. We talked with all sorts of strangers, laughed and told stories. But these turned out to be only moments, and when we got back into town, returning either through Chiswick and Hammersmith, or from Kent through New Cross, or through the endless northern approaches of London, we were aware again of the uniformity of the approaching week.

For me, when I lived alone, the answer had always been a trip to the Continent : my own personal pick-me-up, better even than a whisky sour. Three or four days in a different country had always seemed to me to give a new tang to all the usual things. Maybe it's only because England is an island that it can, every now and then, give the foreigner such a strong sensation of being contained, hemmed in, and held captive. But in that winter of 1902 I didn't go away because Winky was so tied down. I preferred to wait for her to be free. Big sacrifice, as she would have called it if she'd known.

That period seems one of undiluted drabness when I think of it now, but I know it didn't appear quite that way at the time. There were, of course, lovely Sundays ; very pleasant

walks in the parks ; nights when Winky felt a sudden illumination in her performance ; days when I would be excited about something going on in the outside world, delicate negotiations, conflicts and decisions. There were countless times when we felt enormously in love with each other, relishing the whole idea of devotion and compatibility and belonging.

Yet every period has, in retrospect, its overall flavour ; and the flavour of that one was predominantly dull. Not depressing or anguished or bitter : simply dull.

It was in April that Mrs. Croyden called me and asked if I would come to tea. I had not seen her at all since the night the play had opened, and this was the first time she had ever telephoned me. It surprised me, after so much time and considering the kind of life I assumed she led, that she should even remember me by name. * Since I had not seen even Marianne for over a month, I realized that Mrs. Croyden had something very special to ask or tell me ; and I went to see her without great pleasure.

She was as grey as ever ; in fact, she actually wore a grey dress. Her eyes were somehow smoky, indecisive in colour ; she always seemed rather to be showing them than looking through them. Possibly because it was so difficult to judge her by her eyes, I felt at first that she was awkward with me—as if she had acted on impulse when she had telephoned and vaguely regretted it now.

We faced each other in her private sitting-room, a carefully furnished room which was neither warm nor personal, but which nevertheless suited her. I had always considered her serene, but I had never been entirely alone with her ; there are many people whose personality surfaces are one thing when they are being supported by social props, and quite another when they are on their own, like an actor on a bare stage. But Mrs. Croyden was just the same that day as I had always known her. It was impossible for me to imagine

her ever in a state of distress or bewilderment ; she seemed to be utterly clear about herself.

" I'm not at all sure I was right to telephone you," she said with a thin-lipped smile, " but I knew you'd forgive me if I was wrong." She spoke with a perfect sense of punctuation, using her hands or cup to place her commas, semi-colons, and periods.

" I have a problem," she said. " You probably won't think it concerns you at all, and actually it doesn't, but I would like to have your advice."

" Of course," I said, convinced now that it was going to be some form or other of that old business of visas or money exchange.

" I've had a rather surprising letter from our mutual friend, Lucy Forlane," she went on. " Lucy would like to come and spend a few months here with us."

I said, " I see," which was a bald lie.

" I should be very happy to have Lucy, of course. I've always wanted her to stay with us ever since she came to Europe, but she's always turned our invitations down."

" Yes—I know."

She nodded her head at me, as if to specify that we were at least so far in agreement. I found it somehow very comfortable to be sitting there and talking to her. My first impression of her awkwardness very quickly dissolved. She was, in fact, precise and direct ; her whole manner and approach showed that she had no wish to be subtle. Whatever it was that she wanted me to know she was going to tell me without subterfuge.

She said : " I might as well tell you that I've already written to Lucy and said she can come at any time. My husband and I may be going to Rapallo at the end of May, but Lucy could perfectly well stay here with Marianne or even alone. If she wanted to. We never really close up the house because we like to feel free to come home at a moment's notice if we want to, d'you see ? "

I nodded my head.

"Now, I shall write to Lucy's mother and tell her about the arrangement. I'm quite sure she'll be pleased about it. You know we write back and forth a bit, and I've had the impression Mrs. Forlane has not been too happy about Lucy being in Paris all this time. But they're rather indulgent parents and would never have tried to stop Lucy from staying as long as she really wanted to. I'm sure of that."

I said: "I've never met them."

"No. Well, so much is clear. One thing that bothers me just a little is that Marianne doesn't seem too pleased by the prospect of having Lucy here. . . . That was something I thought you might be able to tell me about."

"I haven't heard anything about this from Marianne, you know, and I haven't been in touch with Lucy for many months—oh, not since December."

"Oh?" she said. "I thought maybe you had been. I had the impression you went to Paris quite often. Never mind then. I'm sometimes vague about these things, I may have confused you with Basking who goes to Paris so often. . . . But one thing—when Lucy was here, was it before or after Christmas, I don't remember now. Anyway, it seems to me she left very suddenly and I never quite understood that. . . . I hope you won't think I'm being too inquisitive or asking you to tell tales, but I *have* wondered whether something took place between Marianne and Lucy?"

I had to think a little (without showing it) before deciding what to say. "I don't think it was that," I said. "All that happened was that I gave a little party and Lucy had too much to drink. I think she was probably just embarrassed about it."

"Oh, yes," she said thoughtfully; "I think Marianne told me something like that afterwards, but it did seem strange to me. I must admit I found Lucy in general rather strange that time, not at all as I remembered her. Of course, she was only a child when we visited there. . . ."

She broke off to pour more tea, but again I felt she was using this activity as a kind of punctuation—to signify, perhaps, the end of a chapter.

When she resumed, it was with a slightly more careful voice ; her words were even more meticulously selected.

"I understand from Marianne," she said, "that you have met this man in Paris. Marianne, too, has met him, I believe?"

"Yes—that was the time Lucy was here," I explained. Her approach to this subject made me feel the need to match her own impersonal precision.

"I'm sorry I wasn't able to meet him myself," she went on. "I've heard very favourable things about him, especially from Basking."

"Oh, he was *terribly* enthusiastic about Nordale's painting," I said.

"Yes—Nordale's the nante. Strangely enough I think I once met him in Paris, the first time I went over after the war—it must have been in 1907. Ever since I first heard his name I've thought of a man I met there. . . . But that's beside the point, my memory's simply impossible and I'm probably quite wrong. But I'm wondering now whether this means that Lucy has been having some difficulty with him."

She paused for me to answer. I said finally—and reluctantly : "I got the impression that Lucy wasn't entirely satisfied with the situation."

"Oh? . . . You see, it makes it rather difficult for me to know exactly how to write to her mother. I feel curiously responsible for Lucy ; her parents have a way of counting on me to look after her. And, of course, I've been quite helpless since she hasn't been here at all, but in Paris."

I said : "But I'm sure they don't really expect you to look after her!"

"Not exactly, perhaps. But they do feel more confident somehow knowing that we're over here, and they probably think we spend much more time in Paris than we actually do.

As a matter of fact, I haven't been in Paris for a year. I would so much rather go to Italy whenever I can get away. Do you feel that way about Italy?"

"I certainly do. But I love Paris, too."

She laughed. "You and Basking should get along very well, then. . . . But do please tell me was it wrong of me to talk this over with you?"

"Not at all. Only I can't see that I've been any help."

"I don't think it was really help I wanted," she said reflectively. "I thought as an American you might understand about Lucy better than I do. Also I had an impression that you found her attractive, that you were interested in her."

"It depends how you mean that."

"Oh, my dear, I didn't mean anything very much; I'm really not the sort of person who means anything more than I say. I'm not clever enough for that. No, I simply meant that I thought you saw her occasionally——"

"It's funny you should say that because I haven't had any word at all from Lucy since that party of mine. In fact, I wrote her a letter about January and never got an answer, so I've just considered her as one of those people who's gone out of my life."

"Ah, but now that she's coming here," said Mrs. Croyden, "she'll have a fine chance to go back into your life."

It was a strange remark, I thought, and it made me wonder about her lack of subtlety. In fact, when I reconsidered it, I didn't get the purpose of the whole interview. When I was driving away from the house I realized how odd it had been—not just odd, but pointless. And yet I had a strong feeling that Mrs. Croyden did not commit random acts. I was absolutely certain by then that she had not telephoned me out of impulse, a sudden desire to share my confidence, or even—as she had said—to ask my advice. I had had no advice to give her, nor—when I looked back on our conversation—could I see that she had ever precisely solicited my advice.

In any case, Lucy was there a week later and I saw her the day after her arrival. She seemed to me at once very tightly wired. She laughed too much when we met, she needed a drink right away ; she looked worn out, extremely tense, almost ill.

I took her to the Hyde Park Hotel. She flopped down into a couch and asked for a whisky. If I hadn't felt so sympathetic, I might have thought she was giving a good performance : there was the merest shade of dramatics in her defeated look. Actually she was not at all ill, not even drained. As I sat and listened to her, it struck me that she was full of vitality ; her nervousness only accentuated it.

She began by saying she'd had one hell of a time, a time to remember—or better still, to forget. The worst of it had been making up her mind.

" You know you get to a point where you just can't make a simple decision any more," she said. " All I had to say was that it was over and I was leaving. God—what's there to that ? You just pack up and go. But I couldn't say it. I simply could *not*. It was getting worse and worse all the time, we couldn't agree on anything. And then I got so afraid that *he* would leave *me*. That haunted me. I dreamt about it. In the end that's why I went. If he had ever said he was leaving me I couldn't have taken it, I really couldn't."

She shivered at the memory of her feeling.

" I think he would have, too," she went on. " One more month and he'd have moved out. He said he wasn't able to work any more, and, of course, that's the worst thing he could have said to me. There was no way out after that—I had to go. It wasn't even as if I made up my own mind after all. When he said that I knew I had to go."

I said : " But how could you both ever get to this state ? "

" It didn't seem hard. I don't know, you just kind of forget what you're doing or where you're going. I was dissatisfied for a long time, but then it gradually became impossible. I began to just wait for him to say something,

anything, so I could jump on him, it didn't matter what it was. I really wish I could laugh at myself, I've been so *stupid*, so absolutely stupid ! This is the sort of thing mothers don't tell their daughters about. Somebody should have prepared me. . . .

" You remember that night I called Daniel from Rome ? I thought that was all there was to it, I thought that settled it. I never told you but I wanted to go straight to Paris after that call, but you'd been so damn nice about everything and I could see you wanted me to stay. Frankly I hated that day in Rome——"

I listened to her, wishing that she might be less candid. It wasn't important to know that she had hated being with me in Rome ; that was an unnecessary, a gratuitous, pinprick. That hurt me, not so much because she confessed something I had already recognized at the time, but because it made her seem over-confident. I wanted her to learn not to say these things ; I wanted her to know what things that happened between people could remain hidden and unexpressed.

She finished her drink and sighed. " I guess I really should have gone straight home to Warrenton."

" Why didn't you ? " I asked.

Her smile trembled slightly. " I couldn't bear to be so far away from him. Isn't that plain lunacy ? Right now I want to call him and talk to him."

" But what good would that do ? "

" No good at all ! Don't you think I know that ? I'm going to depend on you to keep me from doing anything as silly as that. But still I can't stop thinking about him and all the things I love in him. That's something else for you not to understand."

" All right," I said. " I'll try not to."

" This morning I remembered that he had tickets for the theatre, to-night. I wonder if he'll go. Oh, God ! . . ." She lit a cigarette and looked away from me. Then she began to play with her little pearl ring and said : " You know, I think

one of the troubles was always Paris. God, I hate that town ! I could never live there again, I never even want to see it again."

" Oh, I hope you get over that," I said. " You will, you know."

" You think so ? I don't. It was always somehow getting in the way. And when I think how I started out loving it. That first day when we were in the hotel and I looked out of the window. . . . Gosh, I forgot about that until just now. It never looked that way to me again—never. I started seeing all the cracks and the dirt—it's like when a beautiful woman starts losing her looks, it's like there's somebody goes around putting powder in all the creases only the creases keep on showing through. . . . No, I don't ever want to live there again."

I was quite willing to let her think that, because I didn't want to be concerned about her. I was afraid that she expected too much of my concern, that she took it for granted. Perhaps, even, she wanted me to take a hand again ; to interfere ; to tell her to call Daniel once more, patch it up, try it again. But this was one time when I was not advising : hands off.

" One nice thing," she said after a pause, " was a couple of times David came to see us."

" David who ? "

" Basking—you know. I never knew what to call him so I finally asked him——"

I said : " You mean you saw him in Paris ? "

" Yes. He came to see Daniel's pictures, he bought a couple more, too. As a matter of fact, he came three times."

" I didn't know that."

She looked surprised. " Well, it wasn't any secret. Didn't Marianne tell you ? He's really awfully sweet ; you know, he never once mentioned that painful night at your house—but let's not talk about *that* ! No, I had a drink with

him a few times when Daniel was working. I guess he's the kind that only goes to the big hotels but I made him take me to some pretty low cafés. I think he enjoyed that."

"Marianne didn't come with him?"

"No, he didn't mention her." Then she laughed. "Now don't you go making something out of it. He really came to see Daniel. . . . Oh, God, I ought to call him!"

"Who?"

"Daniel. How do you suppose he feels now? I wish I knew what to do!"

We didn't get much farther that day, and whenever I saw her afterwards it was very much the same. There was no doubt that she was suffering. She went back and forth over her year in Paris. Some days she blamed herself entirely; she rehearsed all the alternate attitudes she might have taken. At odd times of day she would call me at the Embassy to tell me how blue she felt, how much she wanted to write or telephone to Paris. I was supposed to tell her not to, but usually I said very little.

In a way she was like a person trying to break a drug-addiction. She had to be reminded of her own resolve. The whole idea of Nordale would suddenly overwhelm her, devastate her; and then, whenever I saw her, she would go over the old ground again, telling me (primarily to tell herself) how difficult it had been—how lost, how wounded, how dissatisfied she had felt.

I supposed that it would only take time for her to overcome her obsession. Although I could see a good deal of foolishness in her behaviour, I felt sorry for her. In my eyes she had suffered a deterioration and she was in danger. The greatest danger I saw was that she might never understand the situation and that it would consequently never be resolved. The more she grieved, the more risks she ran. It made her infinitely less attractive when she moaned and wailed and writhed in a kind of self-sustaining agony; it made her boring.

She talked about action, but took none. Eventually she was unhappy with the Croydens, uncomfortable with Marianne, embarrassed with the parents. She depended too much on me ; it became a habit for her to meet me at six o'clock at the Embassy and drink with me at the Connaught or at Claridge's. And any subject I tried to introduce she shoved aside so she could talk about *him* ; after a time, she no longer used his name.

There was almost a kind of enjoyment in it for her, as if we were in league against the world.

Winky was fully aware of the fact that I saw Lucy. At first I told her what Lucy said ; I even laughed about it. But Winky said at last : " Look, honey—I get bored with other people's love-lives. I can see it fascinates you, but after all——"

" But it doesn't fascinate me ! " I said.

" Okay, so it doesn't. Only don't include me. I'm too damned interested in my own life."

The next morning, in my office, I thought again about Winky's attitude ; and I suddenly realized that Lucy had become not only a bore, but an intolerable one. I realized that I didn't want to hear another word about her and Daniel. Every time we met we went over the same conversations, the same arguments, and an unending list of regrets : I knew it all too well by now.

That afternoon I made an excuse when Lucy called and the next day she failed to get in touch with me. Perhaps she was offended—for the moment I didn't care. It would do her good, I told myself ; and yet, behind that thought I was aware of a thin layer of guilt.

It was altogether a disagreeable situation. The next time we met, at my arrangement, we were cool with one another ; she deliberately, and I in spite of myself. In trying to force a show of sympathy I must have appeared to her appallingly false. She smiled at me rather distantly. She said : " I'm thinking of going home and facing my family. When you

come right down to it, I suppose it's your family that forgives everything. . . ."

There was a tone of fatigue and dryness in her voice ; she seemed to me played out. Around us there was a thick atmosphere of hearty British voices : cocktail time at the Connaught. We sat very still, a melancholy pair in the wrong surrounding.

I became aware of a young man with dark curly hair who stared uncompromisingly at Lucy. He seemed unable not to look at her. For a moment I was puzzled, then annoyed. And finally I knew, as clearly as if he had told me, that he was seeing her as I had first seen her. To me she was a different person, a familiar person ; I could no longer see her surface and I had almost forgotten that it existed. For this young man—and for the countless others who would look at her, be drawn to her—she must be the same Lucy I had once known.

And I would probably never see that Lucy again ; she was lost to me. I kept my eyes on my glass and felt bitter, sad, unsettled, at odds with myself. I felt somehow that it was my fault to have lost that first sight of Lucy.

It was some weeks before I saw her again.

§ Fifteen §

POSSIBLY I ought to have known what was about to happen, but I certainly didn't. Lucy had somehow turned me right around ; I was facing in the wrong direction. At least I wasn't seeing what should have been obvious to me, and my anxieties and efforts were completely misdirected. I was, in a sense, like a person walking backward and not knowing it ; knowing perhaps that something was slightly off balance, askew, out of focus—but not recognizing the cause.

A few days after that last afternoon with Lucy at the Connaught I picked up Winky as usual at the theatre. Only it wasn't 'as usual' ; her greeting was all wrong. In fact, for the first time it was so patently wrong that I realized it hadn't been quite right for several weeks. I was upset by it. She wasn't cold—it wasn't that. She was, rather, careful ; I felt that she had decided just how she would say hello to me.

I had to wait for her about ten minutes and I stood backstage, uneasy and vaguely anxious. One of the dangers of living as closely with another person as I did with Winky was that, paradoxically, it coarsened my perceptions. I had become, not more, but less sensitive to her ; the habits we had established made it harder for me to be sharply and quickly aware of her moods or the exact moments when her feelings shifted. I was uneasy waiting for her because I had

suddenly sensed in the atmosphere of her hello that I had missed something farther back, a change that had taken place in her. I knew that we had not talked together very much in recent weeks. Without hostility, we had almost ignored each other ; I saw that now, but I wondered why I had not taken it into consideration before.

She came out finally, looking rather tired but smiling, and said : " Sorry you had to wait, baby. We were kind of late to-night."

" Perfectly all right," I said. She knew, of course, that it was ; I had waited before.

We had to walk a few blocks to the car, because I hadn't been able to park it near the theatre. She didn't hold my arm and for some reason I didn't reach for hers.

" See Lucy to-day after work ? " she said as we reached the car.

" No."

" Oh. Then you've been at the flat ? "

I said, " No, as a matter of fact I've been at the American Club."

" That's just as well," she said. " I was afraid you might have been home."

I drove slowly down Dean Street and turned into Shaftesbury Avenue. The streets were still wet and slick with the evening's rain, but it was clear now.

There was a long pause before I said : " What difference would it have made if I'd gone home ? "

" Just a little. Wait until we get there and I'll tell you."

" Why not tell me now ? "

" I'd rather not," she said.

" Okay." We drove the rest of the way in silence, without even glancing at each other.

She didn't speak until we were actually in the flat ; but once there she picked up exactly where we had left off. Nothing had intervened during the silence.

" The reason I asked you if you'd been here," she said, " is

that I packed my things all day and I knew you'd see if you'd been here."

I decided, even before I could react, that I was going to need a drink. I poured a whisky for her automatically, handed it to her, and then sat down with my glass while she remained standing.

"Why were you packing?" I asked.

"Because I have to go away."

"When?"

"Any time now," she said, but her voice was more decisive than her words. She laughed: "I'm going to take a screen test."

"You mean in the States?"

"Yes. I decided that was one way of getting out of the play."

She finally sat down. I said: "Why don't you take off your coat?"

"I will in a minute."

"But tell me—don't you have a contract to finish?"

She sighed, as if that, of course, was the only problem. "It was for six months with an understanding I'd stay longer."

"And you have stayed longer, haven't you? It's been more than six months. It was——"

"Yes, more. That's why I don't feel so bad about it. Still, they tried to kick up a fuss."

"Oh, it's all settled?"

"Sure."

I swallowed some of my drink. There was too much to be said that I didn't want to hear. I wanted childishly to start all over again, to go to the theatre and pick her up there, suggest having supper somewhere in the town rather than home, to forestall all this talk that was coming and somehow make it disappear.

But I said, "Why didn't you tell me before?"

"But I'm telling you now."

"Yes, but obviously you've known for a little while, anyway, haven't you?"

She turned and looked at me for what seemed the first time that night. "Oh, baby," she said, "what's the use? I'm leaving you and I want to do it the easiest way. Can't you understand that?"

"No," I said, and suddenly I was angry. "No, I don't understand it at all."

"But look—there's very little to talk about. I have to go, that's all. It's no good."

"What's no good?"

"Me and you," she said. Then she laughed again: "Don't look so solemn. Is it going to upset your plans or something?"

"Oh, it upsets my plans all right. That it does."

"But why? Lucy's here now——"

"Oh, shut up about Lucy, for God's sake! Who gives a damn about Lucy?"

She looked surprised and I was afraid, for a moment, that she would lose her temper. But she spoke very quietly: "Don't go on trying to fool yourself, honey. Remember I've seen that look on your face and I don't mean when you were looking at me. If you don't really know how you feel about Lucy—then I feel sorry for you. You ought to find out."

"I'm tired of being told how I feel," I said, and I knew that my voice was out of control: too loud, too strong, and also desperate. I could never sound convincing that way, but I also couldn't hold it back. "Look, Winky, I'm fed up to *here* with Lucy, she bores me absolutely sick!"

She shook her head. "No, honey—it's not true. You're in love with her."

"My God, don't *tell* me I'm in love with her, I'm not. Why should you know better than I do? I tell you she doesn't mean a thing to me. For a while I was sorry for her but I'm not even that any more. Baby, I want you to believe me, *please* believe me."

"How dumb can you get?" she said. "I thought at

least you yourself knew, but you don't. There's a nice fifty-cent word for you and it's obtuse. It took me a damned long time to find it out. There are all these things you don't want to know or see because you're stuffy and pompous. Oh, hell, why do you make me say these things?"

Her words had finally stung me. I had no defence against her except my anger, and that was the weakest weapon of all. I said: "All right. It's nice to know that's what you've been thinking about me all this time."

"Don't be so wounded. It's true, you're all ~~these~~ things. And I love you all the same. You ought to know that by now. Listen, baby, I love you like all hell, there's a laugh for you, but I'm just not the understanding kind. What I wanted was you, that's all I ever wanted, and I don't want whatever's left over. That's not enough for me."

"You're crazy in the head," I said. "This idea about Lucy is all in your imagination."

"Okay, have it your way. Say it's not Lucy, say it's just the kind of life you lead. For me it just isn't real. Maybe it has to be this way for you but it's not my kind of life. It's all too damned high-toned for me, it's too thin. I want some real red blood every now and then, I want people who can *feel* things. I knew better people down and out in New York than anybody I've met with you. Okay, they're your friends, it's no skin off my back. But there's something I miss here, baby—there's something I miss in you. You take the wrong things seriously and you laugh at the wrong things. I'd never be able to get to the bottom of you. I want to, for God's sake—I've tried. I've wanted to knock the stuffing out of you but it's too damned strong for me. And that's all there is—stuffing. I wanted you to be a real person. If you'd only say to me that you *are* in love with Lucy I'd even be glad for that. It would be something *real*. But you can't even face that."

"You've wasted a hell of a lot of time," I said.

"No, I haven't. It was worth the try, at least from my

point of view it was. Oh, I know how you'll think about me, I'm sorry about that. Because I'd like you to remember that I do love you, sweetheart. Believe me, I do."

"What good is that going to do me?"

She shook her head. "I don't really know, but I want you to remember it."

"Would you marry me now?" I said.

"Now—no. Besides which I don't believe you want to marry me; I'm sure you've got some argument or other up your sleeve about our careers and all that. I'm sorry we never talked about that but you've always been holding back with me. I don't know why, but that's the way it's been."

I couldn't think what else there was to say. I wanted time to think. It was all wrong; I felt way off balance. I couldn't fight her.; I didn't even know whether I wanted to fight her. I couldn't imagine her going—that seemed impossible.

"I don't want you to go," I said.

"I know you don't, honey; I understand all about that. But there's no use my staying. You see, it's not fun any more and it has to be fun. There's too much in life for me—and for you—too much for us to stay together and be miserable. It's not worth it."

I said: "Don't go."

She didn't say anything for a while. I watched her playing with her drink. She looked distressed; but I knew she wouldn't change her mind.

I said: "I swear to you I'm not in love with Lucy."

"I'm sorry. I don't think you really know. It certainly isn't my job to convince you."

"I need you," I said.

She looked at me again, more searchingly this time, as if there were something she thought she could draw out of me. "I guess you do," she said. "It's probably true enough, but you don't understand that I don't want to be needed, I want to be wanted. . . . Look—let's try to make it easy, let's let it

go. Just tell yourself it's not serious. Remember that I forced my way in here, you didn't really want me, I was taking advantage of you."

"No."

"Oh, of course I was. Anyway, why don't you let yourself think so?"

Nothing was going to help: I guess she knew that. For a minute she sat suspended, not knowing what to do. I remember thinking that this was not sincere, any of it; a touch of dramatics that some people need in their lives. But then I distrusted that thought. In a moment of desperation I saw that this scene was banal and familiar only because it couldn't be anything else. It was a classic; you couldn't play it any other way. A few different lines here and there; or you could reverse the parts. . . . But the basic elements of the situation were always the same. One person was leaving and the other was to be left.

"When are you going?" I asked.

"Right now."

"Please stay to-night. Why don't you have something to eat? You haven't eaten."

"Oh, no! That wouldn't make any sense at all. Don't be abject—*please*. Take it the way it comes but don't start begging me to stay. I'm going to a hotel."

I said: "I'll take your bags down and drive you over."

"No, I don't want you to. I'll call a cab at the rank."

She left to telephone from the bedroom and I sat where I was. I was not to beg, and I was not to be angry. I couldn't help feeling that there was some response she wanted from me, something that would satisfy her; but I couldn't tell what it was. I had no other response, no other resources. I felt very poor in sensitivity, since I was able only to feel stung, wounded, abject: all that she refused to accept in me. She wanted me to be someone else, I told myself; she was making the cruellest kind of demand on me—one that I couldn't possibly fulfil.

When she came back she said : " I'm flying to New York to-morrow."

" What hotel are you going to now ? "

" What difference does it make ? You'll be lots better off not knowing, because there's nothing more to do. Honey, we could talk for hours about it and in a way we'd enjoy it—but that's beside the point. I'd only end up where I am now—going. There's nothing nice about it and there's no use trying to make something nice *out* of it."

I got up from the chair and went into the bedroom. Her bags were all closed, ready to be carried down. That was final. I brought them into the living-room. " I'll take them down for you," I said.

" Oh, baby, don't be cold ! " she cried out.

For the first time I felt hostile. " You want too much from me," I said. " I can't help you by being warm and big about it. That's not the way I am. I'm stuffy and obtuse."

" Okay," she said quietly. " I'm sorry."

When the doorbell rang from downstairs to announce the taxi I took her bags down. She followed me with two coats over her arm and I could hear the sound of her heels behind me. She waited until I had gone before she told the driver where to take her.

I closed the door of the flat and went into the living-room. I switched on the radio and sat down where I had been before. It was so late that all the B.B.C. programmes were off; all I could get was A.F.N. A cheerful disc-jockey was chatting in an unprofessional voice about the weather, the glass of milk he was drinking, a recollection he had of hearing Ella Fitzgerald sing several years before at the Apollo Theatre in New York. I mixed myself another drink and listened to him. There wasn't anything else to do but sit and listen, and on a lower level to hear Winky's voice again.

I told myself that I had always expected this to happen one way or another—sooner or later. But somewhere along the way I had stopped expecting it ; that was the truth of the

matter. Apparently somewhere along the way I had stopped thinking.

My voice said, Oh, baby, using the word Winky had taught me. Oh, baby, it said to me—imploring, doubting, trying somehow to express the sadness and loneliness that had rushed in on me. She'll be back, it said—and again, Please come back, baby, stay away to-night if you want to but come back. . . .

I sat for about half an hour, I guess, listening alternately to my own voice and then to the records the disc-jockey played. Between us we got nowhere. I could see that man, a young GI, no doubt, sitting somewhere in Germany with a list of records in front of him, maintaining his one-way conversation, fooling, trying to keep all his listeners company : other Americans who were up too late all over Europe.

All at once it seemed to me that I had to talk to Winky again—that very minute. In the bedroom, with the telephone directory on my lap, I tried first the Savoy, then the Berkeley. It was suddenly like being in a detective novel : I was determined to trace her. After about six tries, I found that she was registered at the May Fair. But when the operator started ringing her room, I hung up.

What was there I could say ?

§ Sixteen §

DURING the following week I had two consolatory visits, both of them pretty inconclusive and unsatisfying: one with Kenneth Ware, the other with Victor. Ware called me early in the week, said all the fun—what little there was—had gone out of the play with Winky's departure, and could I have supper with him at the Garrick Club that night. It occurred to me that he felt this was a time when I might need company. I think he knew a good deal of what had happened between Winky and me. Not that he said as much; his whole approach was general. "We certainly will miss her," were the words he used, and I understood, somehow, that he meant by this not so much the cast as himself and me.

He behaved very much like an old friend of the family, offering sympathy—but only if it was needed, since he wasn't the kind to squander his sympathy. I appreciated that tacit offer, mostly because it remained tacit; I felt the intended warmth of it. There was something very English and appealing about it: that ability to suggest an attitude without articulating it. But I was still too confused to be specific with him. I didn't, in any case, want to categorize Winky as the kind of girl I could 'talk about', no matter how delicately and affectionately. Besides, there was so much that I had to think about by myself that I wasn't ready to hash it out with anybody else.

For Winky's going turned out to be, for me, the beginning of many things. I was forced by it to take stock, to take much more than a passing glance at myself. A curious fact began to emerge: I discovered that I had been observing myself in the most superficial way, with very little penetration—taking myself, along with Winky, too much for granted. It was, I imagined, part of my inclination to make life easy rather than productive.

Pompous, obtuse, stuffy—those were the words that I needed to think about. As applied to me, they were fresh words with new meanings. I suddenly understood them in a new way, as if I had just looked them up in a dictionary; and they displeased me, they irritated and bothered me. I couldn't pull myself up and say Winky was wrong, that I was none of these things; because it was possible, oh, very possible, that I was.

"When will you be going back?" Ware asked me.

"Back home? I have no idea. Whenever they get ready to recall me."

"But surely you could make it known. . . . Or maybe you don't want to go back?"

He spoke about going home as if that were obviously the solution, but I couldn't see how. It wasn't the geographical separation that was so disheartening; it was the sense of a complete break that Winky had brought about—something infinitely wider than the ocean between us and much less possible to cross. I couldn't somehow see her turning back.

At the end, as we were standing in the street ready to shake hands and say good-bye, Ware returned to the subject. "See to it that you go back soon," he said. "She's much too valuable. For heaven's sake, don't let her out of your sight! I know it's none of my business and you wish I'd keep out of it—but there it is,"

"But it's not that simple," I began, but I saw that I could let myself be drawn into a discussion that way.

"Oh, of course it is! If it's not, then simplify it. Don't

give her any choice in the matter. I tell you I've been involved with women long enough now to know about them. And I've had my troubles, too. There's no reason for you to have a long face and think you're the only one. Mind you, Winky never spoke to me about you and that's to her credit, but I've seen her when she was expecting you or waiting for you, and it's enough to make any man jealous of you. . . ." He had spoken almost harshly, like an elder statesman advising some young cub of a politician.

I walked a long way after we had parted, wondering if Ware was only, after all, an ageing romantic who had acted out too many happy endings. It was possible that he had begun to mistake the ingenuity of playwrights for the facts of life. In a play, of course, the third act would have to come up with some new development, a complication leading to forgiveness, a second chance, a realization of errors and the possibility of correcting them. • In a play, too, the third act could show a significant change in the main characters—or in only one of them. But that's where it seemed to me the playwright had the advantages of a latitude that didn't exist in life, for he could dominate, he could see things in their patterns and relationships ; whereas real people could only see themselves, and even that not very clearly.

Victor seemed to me much more realistic than Ware. After hedging around a bit to find out whether his surmise about Winky was accurate, he settled down by telling me how he had felt after losing Marianne. I couldn't really see the analogy, but I didn't mind his thinking we had shared a common experience.

"What I tried to do," he said, "was to develop a new interest. That's what kind people are always telling one to do while they themselves go off to their usual round of cocktail parties and dinners. But I was serious about it. Tried butterflies first, but that was so difficult—and rather lonely, too. I didn't really fancy myself as a hunter in the woodlands and it brought me into such strange and distressing

company. I gave it up and played about with chess quite earnestly for a while. Even thought I'd teach myself something fairly useless like Bulgarian. Of course, none of it worked very well but it did help me to get over the worst of it. . . . It's never seemed to me that the day you break up is the worst day. Not at all ! Much worse is the day when you realize it doesn't matter any more. I wanted to snap my fingers in Croyden's face and say, I don't give a fig for your daughter, you old swineherd. Only I was too depressed by it all, I mean depressed to find my old feeling had dried up, just gone."

I laughed. "How many times have you been through it, Victor?"

"Countless times, my friend," he said, grinning. "That's my pattern. I've practically given up trying now. What's the use? The girls I become interested in seem to have a good enough time with me, but then they always marry somebody else. The minute they turn down my proposal they get the one they really want. I have a magic aura, I think. Ought to hire myself out to hopeless spinsters. If they're seen with me they're certain to get a husband."

"Only wealthy spinsters, of course," I said.

"How right you are ! I'd have to charge a tremendous fee, rather like hiring myself out for stud. In fact, I could do with a fee this very moment."

"How's your book been doing?" I asked.

He made what he probably considered a horrible face. "Doing is an unfortunate word in this case. The latest sales figure was 732 copies."

"I don't suppose there's much money in that?"

"My dear fellow, you're so amazingly penetrating ! At this rate I'm going to owe the publisher money. But never mind, my book's too good to be a seller—the publisher knew that. But I stand high on his prestige list."

"I'm very glad for you," I said, laughing.

"Will you be going home soon?"

"Not that I know of," I said. "Why does everybody ask if I'm going home?"

"I just thought you might be rather fed up with London now——"

"Don't wish me bad luck, Victor. I might be sent to the jungle or the desert or Moscow. No, I think I'd like to stay here as long as I can manage it. It's comfortable."

Somehow this set Victor off laughing. He explained finally: "I've always thought all Americans were over-emotional but you're exactly the opposite. 'It's comfortable.' Really, you've been here too long, you're outdoing us."

I saw his point. It was the same point: the point Winky had been making in her own way. I was both embarrassed and annoyed, as if I had unwittingly exposed myself. It wasn't that Victor had offended me. It was just that I was a little sick of myself. I couldn't make a plea that I'd said the wrong thing, because I had said what was apparently the true thing. It was certainly comfortable to stay in London, because it was uncomplicated and undemanding; living in a foreign country always reduces the list of your responsibilities. I was prepared, I realized, to sit it out, to let things blow over, to see how quickly I could forget Winky and her final appraisal of me.

In a way I had always regarded Victor as a person I could laugh at. That night, though, he made me feel that I was the one now in a position to provide all the amusement. I don't mean that he intended to convey that. It just happened.

We drank quite a lot after dinner. First we stopped at a couple of pubs that he suggested. No doubt he had all sorts of pleasant associations with these places, but for me they were drab and utterly pointless. The old dolls who sat at tables and slopped beer or cider over their faces, their clothes, their hands, didn't make me want to laugh the way Victor laughed at them. My drinks were constantly being overturned or stolen or lost. It was all too frolicsome. No violence, no hostility: rather a kind of abandonment that seemed to lack

any core of joy. These weren't West End pubs, of course ; they were all somewhere between Oxford Street and the Euston Road—and they had their own special deflated atmosphere. I couldn't understand their appeal to Victor.

Then, after ten-thirty, when there was nothing to resort to but clubs, we went to my place and continued there. But I got absolutely no elation out of it, no kick. I felt befuddled but at the same time depressed. Victor sat with his long legs stretched out in front of him, smoking through a strange black Italian cigarette-holder that he attached to his index finger, and talked with very few pauses. He was loquacious enough under ordinary circumstances ; but drink seemed to speed him up, so that he hopped from one idea to another, directed by some sort of free association, I suppose, and all the time his speech got faster and faster, as if he thought there might be a time limit.

When he finally pulled himself together and refused my offer to drive him home, he said : " It was rather funny that night we were all here. D'you remember ? I offered to take Winky home and she said she wasn't going just yet. I suddenly realized I'd been uncommonly dim. Not like me. Not a bit. There seemed to be signs of a woman about the flat, but I simply didn't tumble to it. I can usually smell out that sort of thing minute I come into a room. But it was you that put me off somehow ; off the scent, I mean. . . . Am I being offensive ? Don't mean to be, you understand. No offence meant—none took. Right ? "

After several weeks, during which I had no contact with Lucy, I ran into Marianne while shopping at Fortnum and Mason's on a Saturday morning. I had the unsettling impression that she was not pleased to see me. When I asked about Lucy, she said something vague about Lucy's being away. Her manner stalled me ; I didn't feel I could ask any more.

" I may be going away for a bit myself," Marianne said.

"Yes, Daddy's suddenly become keen on seeing Greece, so we may go there in a week or two."

Then she glanced rather impatiently towards the far end of the store, where the wine and spirits department was, and I knew she was looking for an escape. I pretended to be (apologetically) in a hurry. I would phone, I said. She simply nodded her head and walked briskly away.

I was certainly puzzled by her behaviour but inclined just to shrug my shoulders at it. Every now and then, it seems to me, you simply stop understanding people. All you can do is wait until they resume their familiar forms, and sometimes that takes a lot of patience.

It was possible, I told myself, that Marianne had just had a frustrating morning. I didn't think she had any specific cause to try to brush me off. She was basically a good enough hypocrite to have given me a big happy smile when she disliked me most.

Victor was the one who finally clarified the incident. He phoned that afternoon and said: "Have you seen the announcement?"

"What announcement?"

He giggled and spluttered. "Have you got to-day's *Times*? Open it to the page that has the Social News. That's right. Now run down to Engagements. Yes—well, what do you see?"

At first I saw nothing but names amid the formal language of engagement announcements.

"The first one," Victor said.

Yes, it would be the first one, since the announcements are arranged by degree.

It stated quite dryly that the Earl of Basking, son of the late Earl and the Countess of Basking, was engaged to be married to Miss Lucy Driscoll Forlane, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. George W. Forlane, of Warrenton, Virginia.

I had never known before that she had a middle name.

{ Seventeen }

"YOU can imagine," Lucy said, "how exciting it all was. Not that I was *completely* surprised. You know, I've thought a lot about it since it happened ; in fact, I haven't thought about anything else. But what I mean is I should have caught on those times David came to Paris. Naturally I thought he wanted to see Daniel's paintings and all that, but now I realize every chance that turned up he used to see me alone. It's strange the way you can see these things afterwards. . . . He used to try to find out about me and Daniel—oh, I mean whether we were married, or what. And he was really paying an awful lot of attention to me."

"Sounds very romantic," I said and she laughed. We were at the Connaught again, only this time we were in her room, for she was not living at the Croyden house any longer.

"Oh, it is !" she cried. "It most certainly is. In some ways it's absolutely crazy ! You should have heard my mother when I called her."

I said : "I'm a little confused about the sequence of events. When did you call your mother ?"

She smiled at me with an air of patience. There was something in her manner that said, There's going to be so much time now to get things straight. . . . It was a kind of relaxation I found new in her, a feeling of her being settled, of being home after long adventures away from home. Perhaps

she felt that everything was answered for her now : no more unanswerable questions, no illusions to be tested.

"Okay, I'll start at the beginning," she said. "It was like this. One night David came over to the house unexpectedly ; everybody thought he was out of town, so it was quite a surprise. Marianne was mad as hell—gosh, she acted badly ! You know—she put on a real honest-to-goodness tantrum, which isn't really like her at all. The trouble was that she had some date or other that night and I think, frankly, she was just peeved because she couldn't get out of it. Anyway, David was really sweet about it, he sort of joked and said he'd have to settle for me in that case if I wasn't busy. I didn't even think about it one way or the other ; I didn't have anything to do so I just said sure, I'd help him out. Marianne didn't say a thing to that, she just walked out and slammed the door. Honestly—just like Bette Davis.

"So we went out that night. It wasn't anything special, just a darling little restaurant somewhere in Soho, and he was in terribly good spirits considering the way Marianne had acted. He really was cute as a button ; you probably don't know him well enough to know what a wonderful sense of humour he has. . . . It was one of the funniest times I've had in ages. I laughed like silly. I mean we both just had an elegant time together. And then he asked me if I'd like to visit his place in Dorsetshire because he was going down there in a couple of days. Jokingly I said, Why not ? I thought we were just fooling around. Only the next day he calls and starts making arrangements. I thought I'd die, honestly ; I didn't think he really meant it. But there he was telling me that a cousin of his was driving down with us as a sort of chaperone. It was like being back in college—with chaperones.

"Once I saw he was serious, at first I started saying to myself of course you can't go. But then I couldn't see why not. After all he was trying to make it terribly respectable with this cousin of his—her name was Vivien with an 'e' . . .

Naturally it was a little embarrassing, considering Marianne and everything. But I just decided the hell with her, she'd been so disagreeable all along anyway. So I told Mrs. Croyden where I was going and I went. You know, the way I was feeling then—I would have done anything for a change, and the whole idea sounded like fun. And it *was* fun. David's mother is a real darling. I don't know what I expected her to be like, but anyway she wasn't that way. She's much younger than I thought she would be—at least she looks young. And ver-ry stylish. . . .

"It started getting complicated right away." She laughed, remembering the event as she spoke about it. I noticed that her little pearl ring was gone now, replaced by an engagement ring that was pretty impressive in spite of being a kind of discreet understatement.

"It was all a plan," she went on. "I got a real proposal—I mean it, a real old-fashioned proposal. Nothing modern about it. He told me what he had to offer me and how much he wanted me. The funny thing is how cool he was about it. He can say the most passionate things without any expression on his face. He's different all right."

"When's the wedding?" I asked.

"End of June. You'll get your invitation next week. But let me tell you how it went. Because it came to me right off as a tremendous shock; I didn't know where the hell I was. It wasn't just Marianne, although that was bad enough. No, what I really had to figure out was what I wanted myself. And all the time the only thing I could think of was how I said to you that night in your house that I would take him away from her. Famous last words. . . .

"First thing I did was to call home—I mean my family. That's when my mother sort of blew her top. We must have talked for half an hour and, of course, we didn't get anywhere at all. So I told her I'd write about it and then I didn't know what to do. I guess I knew all the time that I really wanted to marry David, but it took me two days to realize it. Then

I called Mrs. Croyden and had a long talk with her. Golly, I know what an awkward position I was putting her in, but what else could I do? She was perfectly calm about it—you know the way she is. She said I must follow my own feelings, that nobody could possibly give me advice. She said they were all very fond of David, they knew he was a fine person and all that. In fact, she rather surprised me. . . .

"But the truth of the matter is that David never intended to marry Marianne. I know he liked her and enjoyed going to the theatre with her and that kind of thing, but I honestly don't think it meant any more than that to him. He's never really talked to me about it and I'm not sure I want him to. Anyway, I don't feel guilty about it."

I said: "Why should you feel guilty?"

"About Marianne, I mean. You know she's gone away. Yes, she and her father have gone to Greece——"

"Yes, I know," I said. I was staring at her very directly, more interested in her than in what she was saying, and I realized that she was slipping away from me. The curious relationship we had had, with its own kind of intimacy, was about to snap apart. We might remain friends, but we'd be a different kind of friends; there would be things we couldn't any longer say to each other, there would be reserve.

This might be the last time, I thought; and so I said what was allowed by our former intimacy. "And what about Daniel?"

She took it well in her stride. "I know what people will say, or maybe they'll just think it—like you. That I'm marrying David on the rebound——"

"Yes, that's a wonderful sort of outdated expression."

"Is it? You know what I mean, anyway, and I want you to know it's not true. Daniel was a mistake; that's the way I look at it. Maybe it's the sort of thing you just have to get out of your system."

"Yes—maybe," I said.

She giggled. "Don't start trying to upset me by shaking

your head because you can't. This is what I want. Let's face it, I'm probably terribly spoiled. I could never be happy leading Daniel's kind of life ; I don't know how to struggle about money and all that. You see, with David it's entirely different. Maybe it'll be too grand for me, but that's a whole lot easier to cope with than the other thing."

"And how does David feel about Daniel?"

"It's all right," she said evasively, and for a moment she looked almost troubled. But her face cleared very quickly. "You know, David has a wonderful philosophy of life ; he says he got it from the Greeks. Very highbrow stuff—but anyway the idea is that the only way to be happy is to want what you have, not what you don't have ; that way you always have what you want. Do you see what I mean ? He says he doesn't *wish* for things the way most people do. I said to him, Well, didn't you wish for me ? That made him laugh ; he said no, he didn't wish for me. If I had turned him down he would have just told himself he didn't want me."

"Oh, that's all very fine——" I said.

"But it works ! Honestly it does. That's what makes him so calm about everything. And I find that"—she lowered her eyes—"well, very exciting. . . . It's going to be so much *fun* ! He's got the darlinest house in Chesterfield Hill where we'll live when we're in town, and then he has a couple of places in the country. Can you imagine *me* ?"

I asked myself whether she was sincere. There was something perverse in my hope that she was fooling herself. I couldn't honestly see anything wrong with the marriage ; it wasn't incongruous or laughable. In fact it was, in a sense, practical. But I knew, without saying so, that I resisted being pleased about it. I was looking for a loop-hole in it.

Why ? That was an attitude a rejected suitor might have taken ; but I had never been a suitor. I asked myself this question again when I was sitting in my car. I turned the ignition key but didn't start the motor. Instead, I sat back, lit a cigarette, and had an imaginary conversation with Winky,

for I couldn't examine my attitude without bringing her into it.

Okay, I said, so you're going to smile and tell me I'm in love with Lucy. That's why I have this queer objection to the marriage. Not because it seems idiotic for her to marry an Earl and live the grand life in England and all that. No—those are only the superficial excuses. The McCoy is that I love her and I'm losing her, so I'm jealous. That's what you're going to tell me, isn't it? Okay, baby, maybe you're right. Maybe I do love her, maybe I've loved her all along, ever since that first time when I spotted her at the station in Paris and watched her in the cab and that evening when I saw her dancing. For once I'll see it your way. . . . Only maybe I loved the *idea* of Lucy. Does that make any sense to you? Maybe I loved her without ever wanting her, just because she stood for something that was fresh and young and kind of innocent, something that appealed to me from a distance and that I never wanted to attain. Could be there's a Lucy in every man's life: a girl who isn't even an individual to you, but a summing-up of all girls. All those beautiful girls. Is that too complicated for you to understand? . . .

It wasn't very satisfactory, because I needed Winky's answers. I felt as if it were something I would never be able to understand entirely on my own. It would take Winky, nodding or shaking her head, feeding me with elaborations of my own ideas, to make it absolutely clear to me.

But what good was that to me now?

The wedding was a curious affair. It was quiet and small, almost discreet, and decidedly dull. The Basking tribe were in solemn attendance, while on Lucy's side there were only her parents, Mrs. Croyden, the Brunots and I. There was an element of unsuitable austerity in both the church ceremony and the reception that followed. I had expected a display of some sort, colourful or impressive; I was disappointed. It

seemed wrong for Lucy to be married in this unimaginative way.

The appearance of the Brunots was entirely unexpected. I got a call at my office from Mme Brunot the day before the wedding : up to that moment I had had no indication that they had been invited. She asked me whether I could come around to their hotel for a drink that evening. I went, of course, and yet I felt furtive about it, as if it were a visit that must not be publicly known.

M^r Brunot was out—perhaps by plan. His wife greeted me with her characteristic effusiveness ; in fact, we exchanged something like a fleeting kiss that was just short of embarrassing.

“ You must tell me all about it,” she said almost at once. “ I have had no word at all from Lucy, only the invitation. Léon did not want to come, but I insisted that we must, if only to see our little Lucy again. „ But it has been such a shock ! ”

“ There’s not much I can tell you,” I said. “ The invitation speaks for itself.”

“ But it is unbelievable ! ” she cried, spreading out her arms violently. “ It never occurred to me that Lucy would not come back to Paris.”

“ I know. I thought she would probably go back, too. But maybe it’s just as well.”

“ What sort of man is he ? ”

“ Basking ? Oh, he’s perfect,” I said. “ There’s no other way to describe him. He’s young and good-looking and wealthy—and even intelligent.”

Mme Brunot laughed. “ Yes, it is so simple. Like a fairy-tale.”

“ No—not quite. I think he knows exactly what he’s doing ; it’s not like Prince Charming at all.”

“ You mean he knows about Daniel ? ” she asked with a dramatically hushed voice.

“ I believe so. He’s a great patron of Daniel’s. But tell me—does Daniel know ? ”

She shook her head, but that was not a show of denial. "My poor Daniel. He is heartbroken without Lucy. In spite of everything he wanted her back. Mind you, he doesn't show it in any way, but I can tell these things. All he said to me one day was that she had written to him to tell him."

I was surprised and said so. "I didn't think she was that sensible. I admire her for it."

"Oh, Lucy has always to be admired! That is her life. She will always do the right things. And, if she doesn't, she will always be forgiven anyway. If other people were to do such things they would be wrong, but Lucy——"

"Yes," I said, "I guess you're right."

"But the sad thing—I suppose you don't know. Daniel's mother died last month. It must have been that stomach ailment she had last summer. Very sad—she was such a lively person. In any case you see now Daniel could get his divorce. Only there is no Lucy any more!"

I could see that she was on the verge of finding this ironical and funny, but she managed to remain serious. And yet I wouldn't have minded if she had laughed. I wanted to laugh myself.

Like Basking's mother, the Forlanes were much younger than one would have expected. Mr. Forlane had the look of a man who is very much at peace with himself; all the guests got an equally small amount of his attention—it amounted to a handshake and two questions. His wife was more animated: I had a few words with her at the reception. She told me in a very gentle Southern voice that she had heard about me from Lucy, and she must have assumed that I was a very good friend. At least she was ready to accept me as one straight off; she seemed to be one of those people who accept everybody, perhaps too easily. Lucy's friends would always be welcome in her home. It was apparent that she was delighted by the marriage, even though she hated the thought of Lucy's living so far away.

"I suppose this was all going on a long time before Lucy told me about it," she said. "For a while there when she was in Paris, I got the impression that she wasn't terribly happy. And it was so difficult to know what to do because she didn't seem to want to come home. But I guess it was just the pangs of love all the time."

She laughed and I laughed with her. I wondered if she would ever know what had really happened in Paris. Why should she? Whatever it was that happened it had (she could always tell herself) ended well; and that was what mattered. Lucy had, in the American way, done something to make the family proud. Her marriage would add to their reputation; in Virginia they would be referred to as those nice people whose daughter had married an English Lord or something. (Didn't such things happen in daytime radio serials?)

She was saying: "But, you know, George—Mr. Forlane, I mean—is terribly disappointed to miss Robert Croyden. I don't know whether anybody's told you that story, but he's been writing letters to Mr. Croyden for oh! years and years."

"Yes, I do know about that, as a matter of fact."

"And this seemed the perfect opportunity for them to finally meet, because you couldn't get Mr. Forlane to Europe for love or money if it wasn't a case of Lucy's getting married. But isn't it a shame? I understand Mr. Croyden's having a big success with his new play here in London. I do hope we'll have a chance to go and see it."

"How long are you staying?" I asked.

"Just a couple of weeks, I guess. I'd hate to tell you exactly how many years it is since I've been in London. It's enough to make you sit right down and cry, the way time flitters away. I came with my family when I was a girl and the saddest thing is that I remember hardly anything. It all looks so *strange* now, but I suppose that's only natural. You know, I feel like it's us that's having the honeymoon instead of Lucy and David. And isn't he a *fine* person."

"Yes, he is," I said, and I turned to look at him, standing tall and sober with one of his relatives. He just missed being too perfect, like a person in an ad for a superior whisky; maybe it was his glasses that saved him from that.

"I tell you I never thought Lucy would have the good sense to pick herself out such a wonderful boy. She wouldn't hear of any of the fellows back home although there were a couple of them that were surely out to get her. She just couldn't be bothered; that's the way she was."

"Oh, I'm sure Lucy could have picked and chosen to her heart's content," I said. "Everybody falls in love with her."

"Now that's a very complimentary thing to say. I don't mind telling you I'm very proud of my little girl. I don't know why I shouldn't say it. I am—I'm very proud."

The Brunots were the only guests who drank much of the champagne. I guess they were surprised that it was so good. Whenever I was near them Mme Brunot winked and said: "Just like a fairy-tale!" When her husband finally asked her what she meant she answered him with nothing more than a laugh. I'm afraid he felt very much out of place at that reception; at least that's how I interpreted his scowl.

Mme Brunot also explained to me that her husband had to fly back to Paris that night, but that she would stay for a week or so. "For the shopping," she said, using the English word. "I want to buy a whole English wardrobe so no one in Paris will recognize me."

Her husband said wryly: "Ah, that will be like a masquerade ball."

"And why not?" she asked. "Paris is boring enough as it is. Aurélie will bring some life into it."

I saw Mrs. Croyden preparing to leave. She was shaking Basking's hand and smiling at him. As we had done no more than nod to each other I wanted at least to say good-bye. I caught up with her as she left the room.

I asked if she would be staying in town.

"Not very long," she answered. "I'll wait until the Forlanes go, at any rate. And then I think I might go somewhere entirely by myself rather than joining Marianne and Robert."

"Have you heard from them?"

"Oh, yes. They're having a magnificent time from the sound of it."

"I'm very pleased. Do send Marianne my regards next time you write."

"I will, certainly," she said. "And you must come and visit some time while the Forlanes are here. After all, you're Lucy's best friend."

"No, I don't think I am. It's too complicated for that."

She sighed, but with a smile. "Oh, it's complicated, you're right about that. But I think it will be all right soon. I have a feeling that this marriage is a very good thing. It's certainly what David wants. He came to see me last week and explained. I found it unusually touching and illuminating, too. The only thing that worries me is Lucy. Does that seem strange? What I mean is that I don't think she understands David at all. You see, in marrying her he's—well, how shall I say it? In a way he means her to be part of his collection. Because that's basically what he is—a collector. I don't know whether that will satisfy her."

It was hard to know what to say, because she had suddenly presented me with a very special view of Basking, and one that was strange to me. Yet it was hard to doubt whatever she said.

She saved me from answering: "We'll just have to wait and see, won't we?"

I murmured something that she could interpret as she liked. She seemed all at once to be way ahead of me. I might never be in a position to answer her questions again; at least I knew she'd never find it necessary to turn to me as she once had.

What she said at last was that I must come and have tea with her alone some time after she got back from wherever she might go. But she didn't permit me to react to her obvious reference to the other time we'd had tea together. She simply gave me a very quick smile, the slightest bit bitter, but mostly amused and even, in a way, witty ; then she left me.

As things worked out, I never saw her again. But I wonder whether I would ever have learned to know her better even if I had seen her and become more familiar than I was. There was always that greyness, that Sargent look, that kept so much of her hidden.

It was over very early. Before leaving, Lucy gave me one of her niece-like kisses and said she would phone when they got back. Somehow I missed saying good-bye to Basking. The Brunots asked me if I could have dinner with them, and I accepted. I didn't want to be alone.

I had promised Victor I'd call him that night, since he had not been invited. Once I had reached him, he was full of questions. He couldn't believe it had been as dull as I described it. He wanted to know all about the Basking clan : who they were, what they had looked like. But he found me, for his purposes, depressingly unobservant.

He said : " I think you're just determined to make me feel I didn't miss anything."

" No, not at all, Victor," I said. " It was really a sad little wedding."

" I don't see why. I suppose that's because Lucy had so few people. Can you imagine what it would have been like if the Croydens had given the wedding ? "

" Not exactly."

" Oh, it would have been an *affair*, you can be sure of that. A tremendous crowd, and photographers, bridesmaids, what have you——"

" You mean Hollywood," I said.

"No—London. We have our own ways of doing these things. You'd have enjoyed it. . . . You know, I feel awfully sorry for Croyden."

"Why him? Why not Marianne?" I asked.

"Oh, because he *wanted* it so much. That would have been the supreme fulfilment."

"I suppose he really wanted it more than Lucy did," I said rather carelessly.

Victor wasn't the kind to let anything pass. "That's a strange thought! What makes you say that?"

"I don't know."

"We must have a drink over that. What about to-morrow?"

"Okay."

"I say—I've just had a startling thought myself! Maybe *I'm* the one who should have married Lucy."

§ *Eighteen* §

THE first familiar person I ran into when I got back to Washington in October was Harrison Beck. He had apparently survived his rather short African experience ; it had resulted in his being appointed to the Africa Desk in the Department ; and he impressed me as being extremely happy about it. He was in the throes of house-moving when I saw him, bustling in his fat way down one of the corridors of the new State Building ; and he helped me to settle down in Washington with unexpected ease by telling me that the apartment he was just leaving was still available.

So, within twenty-four hours of my arrival, I had a new permanent address and a new telephone number. Once my belongings got safely across the ocean from London I could start a new life. At least, if life were half as neat as one likes to think it is, I could have started afresh.

But, in the meantime, I had two months' return leave on my hands, and no special feeling about how I should spend them. Once the paper work involved in returning from an overseas assignment was out of the way, I left for New York. While you're away you feel you have a lot of catching-up to do ; but once back, it all has a way of seeming unessential. The theatre always sounds more interesting, more exciting, when you're not in New York. The museums, the night-clubs, the streets and the people—once they're available again, they seem much less desirable. Very quickly everything

becomes reversed : the interesting activities all seem to be happening abroad.

I felt utterly aimless in New York. The few friends I saw there were very nearly strangers to me. We had written to each other many times, saying how we looked forward to meeting again. But once we were there, having drinks in their comfortable New York apartments, sitting with plates on our knees, or dining at table, the meetings lost their urgency. We could, in all honesty, have lived without one another. In conversation, they made reference to things that were unfamiliar to me, spoke about people I had never met. When they asked me about my life abroad, I found curiously little to tell them ; and then they started telling me what they'd heard from other friends, or what they themselves had experienced during summer vacations. They were as bored with me as I was with them. It was a shame, because we couldn't have been able to say why. The whole business of seeing these people made me feel out of step. I knew I could get back in after a little time, but at that moment I had no urge.

The important reason for being in New York—I needn't have tried denying it to myself—was that I might be close to Winky. That had occurred to me as soon as the news of my transfer had first come, but I had not gotten very far in thinking out my approach. I felt like a lawyer preparing an appeal from an unfavourable verdict : I could not just say, 'please'. I had to have new evidence, had to have some new point to make. But that wasn't my way. I was more likely to try to improvise once I saw her, and it was that that made me feel insecure.

All the same, I started telephoning the number that information gave me for her, and all I got out of that was an answering service that told me, each time, that she was out of town. No, they didn't know how long she'd be away, but would I leave my name ? I didn't leave my name, I was afraid of messages.

After a week of that, I phoned her family long-distance,

but they, too, were unable to help me. She was probably in California ; they hadn't heard from her for a couple of weeks. I called myself 'a friend from London', and let it go at that.

The pointlessness of my being in New York made me decide after three weeks to go back to Washington and sit out the remainder of my leave there. I realized, once I had made up my mind, that there were probably lots of people I knew who might be there—more compatible people, at any rate, than there seemed to be in New York. I was sad to leave though ; sad to think that I had become so specialized in my work, so boxed up in my uncomfortable compartment, that I couldn't even adjust myself to the simple demands of social behaviour. That was something that had once satisfied me—but now it didn't. Far from it. I was, by this time, obsessed with Winky ; she was the standard by which I measured all other people. And they all fell way below that standard. There's nothing fair in assessing people this way, but it's a lover's way.

I might have been more ingenious in trying to get in touch with her ; but I also had a curious feeling of patience about it. She was at least in the country. If she didn't come back to New York soon, there were ways of finding her in California. I never doubted that I could reach her ; it was just that I didn't know exactly what form her rebuff would take. Or how I would cope with it.

I remember leaving New York at around six o'clock on a Friday. Being early at the station, I stopped at one of the bars to have a short drink. I was standing at the bar, rather engrossed in my drink, when someone tapped me on the shoulder. I turned around and saw a familiar person, but it was some seconds before I remembered his name.

He was in the same situation. "Didn't I meet you somewhere?"

"Sure," I said, "you ought to remember me by now."

"Everything but the name. My name's Munce. Avery Munce."

"Yes, I know. Saw you in London last time. What are you doing here?"

"Waiting for a train," he said, a bit glum.

"No, I mean in New York. I thought you were practically an expatriate."

"Oh, well—I've been back here quite a while now, must be about a year. Yeh, just about."

"How's business?"

"That's a laugh—*business*."

I asked what he was doing.

"Got a temporary job at Lord and Taylor's," he said.

"I thought you were in the movie business."

"*Were* is the correct expression. *Were*, was, used to be—that's the picture. I'm in men's apparel now."

"So I see. What happened? Did you get fed up with the big life?"

He laughed. "Big life he calls it. Let me straighten you out—it's the smallest life there is. What I'm doing now, at least I feel like a man. Nobody's making me run. Know what I mean? What makes Avery run? That's the story of my life, brother. They can keep it."

"Keep what?"

"What I'm talking about, the business, the big life, the ulcer racket."

"I'm kind of sorry to hear it," I said.

"Why you sorry? I'm not."

"No, I'm sorry because every time I ran into you I was in touch with a different kind of world, all those stars and producers and agents. Now you disappoint me. I was ready to hear about big Hollywood deals, a lot of inside dope and all that. Last time you were all excited about that Isobel March."

"Oh—*her*!"

"Whatever became of her?" I said.

"Who knows? I guess she's doing all right. She's been on the Coast for a while. Probably she's got a contract.

Probably she won't be used. A lot *they* know what to do with a property like that. You think they're worrying about properties? They're worrying about TV. They got to make bigger screens, more noise, spend more money. She'd be good and lost out there."

"I suppose so," I said. "But you don't happen to know where she is right now?"

"Me? How should I know? I'm not her agent."

"Who is?"

"Danny Fogel. He's a shnook. I tried to do something for her, but some people they can't tell the difference between a friend and a crumb. This I know from experience. Believe me, March may be an okay actress, I'll admit that, but she's got plenty to learn about other things. That's what gets me about the whole racket, everybody's got just the one thing on their minds. There's absolutely no culture. I don't know—it's a very very shallow business."

"You sound well out of it," I said.

"I'm thanking my lucky stars. What I'm doing now I got steady hours, I got my own job to do, at the end of the week that little old cheque is waiting for me. I don't have to worry about geniuses and promise and knocking myself out for somebody else—and no appreciation anyway."

I laughed. "You sound like an ad for the satisfied man. . . . Are you catching the six-thirty?"

"Yeh—I am. I'm going down to Philly to take in a show they're trying out there."

"Oh, so show business is still in the blood."

He smiled as if to show that he was the first person to be amused by himself. "I just know a couple of the kids in the show. Anyway, I enjoy it. You know—being on the outside it's fun. I sit in the audience, it's nothing to me if the show's good or putrid. I go to movies—they stink, so what? Nobody's gonna come down on my neck because it stinks. I can afford to laugh——"

We sat together in the train as far as Philadelphia. There

was time enough for me to get some more information out of him about Danny Fogel ; I had decided that was the best lead to Winky.

And when Avery got off the train at the Thirtieth Street Station, I was sorry to see him go. He seemed to me, at that moment, more entertaining, and in a way more real, than many of my real friends. I enjoyed the memory that he and I had spoken to each other in Rome and in London. It didn't seem incongruous that we should meet again at the Pennsylvania Station ; on the contrary, that kind of accident made life seem an unbroken continuity. I had begun to feel that it was the fear of having the various parts of my life unrelated that depressed me and made it difficult for me to shift back and forth. I suppose everybody's life is broken up that way : a variety of contexts which don't necessarily gibe with one another. And yet they have to be co-ordinated somehow, or else you're always one step behind yourself—never precisely in the place where you want to be, or doing what you want to do.

But I wasn't a quick-change artist, and that's what you need to be.

I must have been pretty naïve when I wrote to Winky in care of her agent's office, because I started to look for an answer from her a week after my letter had been sent. I didn't say very much in the letter—only that I was back, that I'd like very much to be in touch with her. . . . Afterwards I began to worry whether I'd been too cool. I hadn't even written 'Love' at the end, only 'Yours', too ambiguous and, it seemed to me later, blunt. Anyway, there wasn't any answer ; and as time passed by I became less and less proud of what I'd written. It occurred to me that I ought to have tried somehow to *tantalize* her into answering. And eventually I was convinced that I should have been simply honest ; but by then I knew I couldn't patch up whatever bad impression I had apparently made.

After a while (but a long while) I stopped unlocking my mail-box with any expectation ; and after another while I began to come to terms with my existence in Washington.

It wasn't the worst, after all. Washington can be a stimulating city, even if it's mainly a smug one. For me it was never an entertaining place ; it lacked variety. Because there is so little activity there outside of 'government', everything has an underlying and, in the end, deadly sameness. Although I had friends in Departments other than State, they all shared a basic approach to life that struck me as exceptionally uniform. Government activities in London had been submerged inside a great city, disguised by the city and practically lost in it ; but in Washington, the city had no independent existence. Form and substance were somehow identical.

I suppose I could have gone on that way forever. There are some people who make a point of shaping their lives by never letting life become a habit, 'Masters of their fate' and all that. But I didn't consider myself one of those. Just as I didn't identify myself with the kind of person who can affect external events. But then, I guess there have to be both kinds : as well as the gradations in between.

I could have gone on, as I say, indefinitely, except that suddenly I was stopped in my tracks by nothing more than a short item in the Sunday paper. It was announcing that Croyden's play—yes, the same one I had lived through—was going to open its tryout in Washington. Winky was to be starred in it.

Reading this, I was at first immediately transported back to Europe. I had to sit back for a little while, with the paper in my lap, and take in the news. Its first result was to produce only memory : London and Winky, Marianne, Basking, and finally Lucy. They had all receded from me in varying degrees in the course of a long winter, and they came back to me now, came back to life, in full colour, with all the warmth and torment of nostalgia.

Then the date of the opening became a reality to me. In two weeks the play would be there, resuscitating a dead part of my life. That realization pinned me between future and past, which acted like equal weights, keeping me suspended between them, and actually nowhere.

I thought for a few days of not going to the opening, not going to the play at all. But finally I asked Harrison whether he'd care to see it with me. He had to consult his date-book first, and found that he could. "It'll probably be a grand snob opening," he said happily. I was sure he was right.

I was also sure, once we were there, that it was wrong for me to have come. It was as if I had deliberately sought out a way to suffer. The play's appearance in Washington was nothing but a means of getting at me. I fell into the trap—but good. There was nothing to relieve me. I saw only Winky, in full command of herself and the stage. She was winsome, rather plain, young, hopeful, defeated. In every way she was the focus for both the other players and the audience. She never faltered or weakened or lost hold. She was so thoroughly that girl, Peggy, that even I could hardly dissociate her from the role, except during the intermissions.

Harrison was enthusiastic and exuberant. While scanning the lobby and nodding here and there, he told me how wonderful Winky was, how she reminded him of Laurette Taylor and Lynn Fontanne, how she moved him. . . . He even liked the play. While I, during these intermissions, was withered by depression, shrinking from contact, from the shaking of hands with acquaintances, the smiles and incidental remarks. Any social occasion was a performance in itself for Harrison, so I think he was quite unaware of my discomfort. I must have looked as if something at dinner had disagreed with me. I have a feeling that I looked *small*.

But Winky had once told me that you live through everything—if you're going to live at all. The last line of the play actually got itself spoken, the curtain was lowered, and there were bows. I tried to think about something else and didn't

look at the stage. It was too large a helping of the past for me to digest at once.

"Well, *that'll* be a success!" said Harrison, with the confidence of ignorance.

"I suppose so."

"I saw another Croyden play in London some years ago. Loved it!"

Harrison might have loved it; he might not. But his emotions and tastes were shaped to fit the situation. If there was any chance that Croyden was going to become a stylish success in America, then Harrison would have 'loved' some other play of his in London. Harrison was a good, a practiced, intellectual snob. If, by any stroke of fate, Croyden were to become a commercial success as well, suitable to all tastes, then Harrison was the sort of person who would just as patly disavow any fondness for the man's plays. If Croyden should ever become everybody's property, then Harrison certainly didn't want him to be *his*.

I had no taste for lingering at the theatre as Harrison wanted to do. I said that I would go straight home, and he easily attached himself to a group of people who seemed to find it quite natural that he should be with them.

The evening seemed to have been a thoroughgoing disaster for me, and I was better off being at home alone. I don't know how I had expected to react to seeing Winky again, but I had certainly been unprepared for the sense of shock and injury, and the plain physical pain that I felt then. There wouldn't be any further attempts: I was convinced that night that there was nothing for me to gain in seeing her. We could never make a success of being friends. The evening appeared to me to provide the delayed ending to the whole affair: an ending I had half anticipated and wholly feared.

But I couldn't have been more wrong.

The next morning there was a short note from her asking if I could have lunch with her at the Mayflower that day.

My first impression when we met was that she was 'dressed

up'. She wore a hat and long very clean white gloves. The preliminary look she gave me was serious, reserved, even formal. She was using a new, pungent perfume.

"I kept the address from that letter you sent me," she explained.

"I never knew whether you really got it."

We were both of us ill-at-ease, trying not to show it, smiling falsely and being over-polite.

"Oh, yes, I got it," she said. "But I had to think so hard about answering."

"I guess I left you lots of room not to answer."

She smiled. "Did you mean to?"

"No. I wanted you to answer by return air mail special delivery."

She let that go and turned to the ordering of lunch. I left it all up to her since I was there, in a sense, at her initiative.

"I don't suppose you saw the play last night," she said.

"But I did."

"How could you stand it?" She giggled, as if to show that we were on safe ground.

"I very nearly couldn't, as a matter of fact."

"But why didn't you come back to see me?"

"Because you hadn't answered my letter," I said.

She stared at me, but not unpleasantly—only as if she wanted to see what I really looked like.

At last she said: "I think we've both been too civilized, you know."

I didn't understand.

"Oh, all I mean is that we've tried to do *the right thing*, as if that's so damned important. I mean, you deliberately made your letter dull and cool, and then I deliberately neglected to answer. And really the truth was that I was dying to see you."

"You were?"

"Of course I was. Didn't you want to see me more than you said?"

"In the letter? Oh, *much* more. You didn't know how I tried to phone you in New York and I even called your family——"

"That *was* you? I kind of hoped it was. But why in hell didn't you leave your name?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Anyway, it's kind of wonderful seeing you now," she said. "It really is, honey."

I couldn't help smiling, but I didn't say anything. I was still afraid of saying too much, and too soon.

"There's a lot I want to tell you," she said with a sigh. "How long will you be in Washington?"

"A long time I should think."

"That's good."

We made a stab at eating, but she grew impatient and pushed her plate away. "Look," she said, "I want to talk to you right now. Can you stand it?"

"Please talk. I want you to."

"Yes, you're kind of waiting, aren't you? But why shouldn't you? Okay, I'll tell you something. . . . I'm sorry I walked out on you. It was exactly the wrong thing for me to do."

"Why?"

"Because I was only repeating an old pattern of mine. It took me months to see that, I had to get off the boil first. And I only saw it because I was so unhappy. You remember I told you that whole story about me and a guy called Martin? You know, it was something that happened a long time ago and all that. Well, I did the same thing with you. I *knew* that you liked me, maybe even you were crazy about me. And yet I didn't trust you. I don't know why. When I thought about it afterwards I decided it was that experience with Martin that made me distrust you. God, that made me mad! Because it was something out of the past and yet it was having an effect on me."

"But it was my fault," I said.

"No, that's where you're wrong. You're absolutely wrong. You were acting the way it's natural for you to act. You were interested in that girl—why shouldn't you be? Whatever happened to her, by the way?"

"That's a long story."

She waited for a moment, then laughed. "You know, baby, this isn't easy for me."

"I know," I said. "It's not for me, either. I'm still waiting to hear what the last sentence will be."

"Well. . . . Let me put it this way: it can be whatever you want it to be."

I took her hand and said: "You mean it?"

"Sure I mean it. It's up to you."

I laughed loudly enough to make other people in the dining-room turn around.

I said: "But this is pure wish-fulfilment, honey. Why did you wait so long? I've been wanting you for months and months. I was going to promise anything, anything you asked me. I was going to beg you——"

"Oh, I'd hate that. You know why I waited? Because I was a little scared. You'd had enough time to meet somebody else. After all, it's a year, isn't it? You think I wanted you to smile your sweet smile at me and say, It's too late, isn't it a shame? Hundreds of things might have happened to you. I didn't know what you'd be like."

I said: "Do you really think people change so much?"

"They *do* change, but maybe only a little."

"Suppose I want to marry you—does that mean I've changed?"

"Sure—a little."

"Well, I do," I said. "I mean, I want to marry you."

"This must be the wrong script, I'm sure it is. You're not supposed to rush at me like this."

"Why not? Don't think about it. Just say you want to."

"Okay, baby," she said, "but not right away. Let me see this show through. We're opening in New York at a lousy

time of year. It probably won't last through the summer. Let's decide after that."

I was momentarily disappointed. "But I want us to get married impulsively—just because we want to. And then work it out afterwards."

"Yes, me too. But let's give ourselves some time. Let's see how we feel together. Let's be apart and have week-ends and have lots of fun."

"Okay, honey—let's have it that way. I'm crazy about you."

"What else?"

"I want you."

"What else?"

"I love you."

"What else?"

"That's enough for now."

In a different tone of voice she said: "Are you sorry I moved in on you in London?"

"No, honey."

"What are you sorry about then?"

"Nothing," I said.

"You're a doll, you give all the right answers. Teacher's satisfied. . . . But you know this is really all wrong."

"What?"

She laughed at me: I must have appeared anxious. "I mean it wasn't supposed to go like this. It was supposed to drag on and on. You were going to be cool and collected and suave, I was going to have to be subtle and get around you——"

"Is that how you expected me to be?"

She nodded her head. "It was possible, very possible. After all, I was going to have to be forgiven for breaking it up and all that. That's why I keep on thinking it's all wrong. Two people don't meet after a year and just fall into each other's arms."

"We haven't," I said.

"Oh, but we *will*, baby, we most certainly will ! . . . But tell me, do you think we're being realistic——"

"Do we have to be?"

"—Or practical? Aren't we just being romantic?"

"I hope so."

She frowned. "No, no, don't say that, honey. I want it all to be absolutely clear and sure. I don't want any way out of it. See what I mean? Because I feel differently about you—I mean it's not just the way it was before. I want to tell you something you may not like, but please try to understand what I mean. . . ."

"Okay."

"Well—there have been other people during the year we've been apart. I'm sorry, but it happens, you know—out of curiosity, or flattery, or—oh, all kinds of things. But what I'm trying to say is that it only proved to me how crazy I was about you. I missed you, baby. These guys may have been better-looking or smarter or easier to get along with—but they just weren't you!"

I said: "That's a real backhanded compliment."

"Does it bother you?"

"I'm not going to let it."

"But it gives you a little twinge?"

"Sure it does, a big fat twinge."

"I'd hate to enjoy that, but I guess everybody has to have at least one person jealous about them."

She gave me the smile I suppose I had been waiting for. It somehow expressed everything about her: her vitality, her ability, her sense of play and fun, even the sense of tragedy that there always was in her eyes. Her smile made me feel that I was ready for her.

She said: "I won't talk about any of this again, but one of them was Martin. Isn't that the strangest? I ran into him out in Hollywood; we had drinks and talked about old times and how much everything had changed. For a couple of weeks I saw a whole lot of him. But it was kind of awful

because I wasn't in love with him. I guess I just didn't understand it until then. You see, all that time in London—oh, I suppose ever since I last saw him, which was about five years ago—I still considered myself hopelessly in love with him. It was buried, you understand, but it was kind of constantly there. And then, in Hollywood, I found it wasn't true. It really made me flip ! As if they'd taken the Statue of Liberty away or something. And then what worried me was that after five years, if I didn't see you in all that time, probably the same thing would happen. I wouldn't love you any more."

"That's because you just have a fickle nature. No staying power."

"Go on—tease me all you want. Right now I'm building myself up to be a one-man woman."

"That's all right with me. But what about my being pompous ?"

She snickered and scratched her nails across my hand. "You're pompous, but that's one of the things I like about you."

"And obtuse ?"

"That, too. I know what I've got on my hands. A dud, a lemon—call yourself whatever you want. That's the way I want you. After all, I've got plenty of adorable faults myself. . . . But please, baby, let's get out of here——"

We had two concentrated weeks together. They were like the London days ; and even better, as they were less aimless. It was all familiar to me : picking Winky up at the theatre every evening, meeting her for lunch. And then the long private Sundays, summing up all the rest of the week. There was a beauty in reconciliation, as well as an intensity, that we had not known before.

During those two weeks, we could hardly ever stop talking. Winky had to know all about the things that had happened in London after her departure ; and I had to trace her from the

plane, when it brought her to New York, to California, and then back again. Lucy's marriage to Basking turned out to be a huge joke to her. Days after she first heard about it from me, she'd suddenly burst out laughing and explain that she had just thought of Lucy. "It's absolutely wonderful," she said. "I can't help it. It's like an example of American enterprise. That girl going over there to Europe and wowing everybody—and then snatching that guy away from the Croyden crowd. It's as if we won the war all over again!"

She appeared to me to feel unsettled about her career. The Hollywood experience had not been particularly pleasant. Though she was signed to do a certain number of pictures, she had not been cast because no one could find 'the right part'. She had hung around for months, partly because it had intrigued her, and partly because there had been nothing better to do. She had been swamped by people with scripts or outlines or just ideas. At one point she was almost stampeded into a Biblical extravaganza; one producer tried unsuccessfully to get Tennessee Williams to do a made-to-measure script for her; she was somehow always being offered parts that Olivia de Havilland had turned down. "It's all so unprofessional," she complained to me. "Everybody's at sixes and sevens, from the top down. I couldn't tell how anybody *ever* made any decisions. But they'll come up with something pretty soon that I'll have to accept even if I don't want to. I'm an investment now; they'll find ways to force me."

For months she had refused to do the Croyden play. And then suddenly she had changed her mind. Why shouldn't she do it? It was a part she could do well, a rich part and a familiar one. She was sure to get good notices; and it couldn't possibly harm her. . . .

She spoke about these things dispassionately, as if they had only a clinical interest for her. As for me, though I naturally wanted to know all about it, I felt little itches of fear. There was still that problem of our future to be solved. It was fine

to be impulsive, but that wasn't going to wipe the problem away. And yet I was not deeply worried: we would simply work it out. I was determined about that.

When the two weeks were over I wondered how we would function apart. But that also took care of itself. We had every week-end together, and during the week we were in contact by telephone. The play fared better than had been expected, and was set to run through the summer. It became a prestige item. Ladies' clubs bought seats in blocks and went home baffled and deceived. Nobody who went to see it knew quite what to hope for; nor, afterwards, quite what they had gotten. But Winky, at least, did not let them down or cheat them. She was remarkably controlled all that summer. Exhausted after two performances on Saturday, she would, nevertheless, be pleased with her week's work. We would rush from the theatre to her new apartment on East 64th Street and lock ourselves in together as if there were people following us. Only rarely we went to public places, and only once during the summer she invited friends in for drinks on Sunday. Otherwise we almost isolated ourselves.

It was in the middle of the summer that it first occurred to me to quit my job. A year before it would have seemed to me an outlandish idea, and I would have rejected it without consideration. But this time, when it appeared in my mind as a possibility that at least warranted some thought, I found first of all that I wasn't afraid of it. And gradually I began to consider it sensible as well as challenging. The truth of the matter was that I had no idea what I could do in New York: the diplomatic career leaves one curiously unfit for very much else. Yet, for that reason, it became a very exciting prospect. It was a way of forcing me to shape my life; at least to take a hand in it.

I didn't talk to Winky about it for several months. When I did, after the summer was over and we began to walk in the Park to admire autumn, she took it very quietly. It was as if she didn't trust herself to express her spontaneous

reaction. I told her how long I'd thought about it, that wasn't a rash decision, and that I had finally come to the conclusion that it was the only possible solution.

"But won't you miss all that—that *business*?" she said. "I mean the importance of it and the free travel and what not."

"I guess I'd miss you a hell of a lot more," I said.

After a bit of thought, she said: "I've been waiting to hear what you had in mind. I wasn't going to say a word about it. But now I feel kind of guilty about it—because this is exactly what I wanted you to do."

"Oh, well, if it satisfies you, there's no question about it. I'll start the ball rolling when I get back to-morrow."

"You may have to live off me for a while," she said with a laugh.

"I don't mind."

Everybody in Washington tried to talk me out of my decision. I simply felt that they were so clogged up with bureaucracy that they couldn't understand my state of mind. I was as patient with them as I could be; but now that I had made my decision, I wanted its implementation to be as swift as possible. It had to take two months, though: it meant shifting of personnel, I had a project in hand that I had to complete, all the fragments of my work had to be pulled together and neatly wrapped up. I would be free by November first.

And then Lucy turned up.

§ Nineteen §

THE voice that said, "This is Lucy," on the phone was completely unfamiliar to me. I didn't think of *my* Lucy at all. I simply wondered what woman it was that I might have met somewhere who considered herself so familiar as to introduce herself by her first name only.

After I parried with an evasive "Oh, yes?" she became insistent. "Oh, you don't know who it is at all, do you? It's Lucy Forlane, Lucy Basking."

It was only then that I remembered her lisp. She didn't quite say, "Looshy," but it wasn't far from that. Long ago I had forgotten the lisp and stopped noticing it. Now it seemed the most characteristic thing about her speech.

"I've come over to visit the family so I'm quite close to Washington," she said. "But, you know, you're terribly hard to get hold of. You in some secret job or something? Had to talk to four people before I found anybody who even knew your name."

I didn't tell her that my home telephone number was in the Washington phone-book.

"But look—I'm going to be in town to-morrow," she said. "Couldn't we have a drink or something?"

"Sure. Sounds fine."

"What about the Carlton? Or can you suggest something more exciting?"

"No," I said. "You know what Washington's like. Let's make it the Carlton."

"Around six?"

"Yes—six."

It was almost like looking at two people where there was only one. I saw a smartly dressed woman: rather discreetly dressed, perhaps, in the English style, except for a large and showy mink coat. She was made up and groomed in a way that my Lucy had never been. And this all gave her a mature look: a look that comes from beauty parlours and hair-dressers.

But sitting inside this woman, muffled and obscure, was the younger Lucy I had known, with her little private smile, her air of innocent composure, her lack of anxiety and experience.

It was confusing.

"Aren't you surprised to see me?" she said.

"Surprised? I certainly am. It's almost not a strong enough word."

"Oh, now don't make it *too* good. You probably knew I'd turn up again. Sooner or later. Everybody always does."

"Yes, they seem to," I said.

"You're looking awfully well. Something's agreeing with you."

"I'm in pretty good shape," I said.

She laughed a bit nervously and sipped her drink. "It's just marvellous to get a real Martini again."

"If you mix them yourself in England, they're just as good."

"I don't think they are. They just don't taste the same."

We were having difficulty in launching ourselves. That's the trouble with these meetings after a long separation: where to start? In this case it was particularly frustrating; I wasn't sure which of the Lucys I should be talking to. We had no background of sheer conversation to fall back on, and our former intimacy had been broken. She looked to me

like the kind of woman who might not like to be reminded of the things I knew about her.

"How is David?" I asked.

"In the best of health and happy as a lamb, I guess. He's become interested in politics all of a sudden, so he's always at the House of Lords. I think it's rather a bore, but I suppose he'll ~~go~~ over it. Oh, and, of course, he's just crazy about our son."

"You have a son?"

"Didn't you know?" she said. "I don't know why you should but I just sort of thought everybody knew. Yes, we have a big, scratching, screaming, burling boy, another David, but we call him Eric. He's almost six months old now."

"You didn't bring him, did you?"

"Goodness, no. I wouldn't have been allowed, even if I'd wanted to. There's not only the Basking nannie, but his own private nurse, too. They work things out between them somehow, and I'm allowed to peck in at certain hours."

"Sounds very traditional," I said.

"You're so right. And very un-American, too. My mother thought it was dreadful when I told her; she says she's going to write David a very strong letter."

"But I suppose that's the way David was brought up. . . . Why didn't he come with you?"

She stared at me mockingly. "And be absent from the House? Don't be silly! You know how determined David is."

We each had another drink, and I began to feel a little less strange. Her voice warmed me and even excited me. Behind all that façade of sophistication, that lacquered, photographed-by-*Vogue* look, the voice was Lucy. The original. No one else in that cocktail lounge knew it; they were all, if it mattered to them at all, fooled by appearances. I felt like the trustee of a secret. My lips might be sealed, as the expression

goes ; but my memory was personal property over which nobody had any control.

She sighed after her remark about David, then held up her drink as if to toast me. "It's fun to be back," she said. "I forgot so much since I've been away. I almost forgot what Americans look like !"

"Do you like their look ?" I asked.

"Of course I do. Best in the world, isn't it ?"

"Oh, I don't think it's *that* different," I said.

"But it is. You're just used to it again. Everybody looks so *nice* here. I mean they dress nicely and they have a kind, clean look ; and their teeth look good. I don't know—I just like it."

"What's the matter ?" I said. "Tired of Europe ?"

"It's not exactly that," she said thoughtfully. "I don't really know *what* it is but, you know, I think Europe kind of *scares* me."

"Scares you ?"

"Yes. I wish I were here to stay. I wish I weren't going back."

I didn't like the turn the conversation was taking, but I didn't see how I could stop it. I said : "But surely you're happy with David."

"Oh, I'm happy with David. But one thing I've learned"—she giggled—"being married is kind of a bore. I mean it. It's all so much the same thing day after day. . . . I must have been awfully dumb because I didn't expect it to be that way. Don't misunderstand me—David couldn't be sweeter. I have everything I want and all that. More than I want really. Like this coat. You know what it cost ? Ten thousand pounds ; that's about thirty thousand dollars. I'm ashamed of it. That's the way he is with me. But sometimes I think he's not really *in love* with me. He just wanted me and he got me—that's all there is to it."

"But, Lucy," I laughed, "haven't you given up expecting everything ?"

"Is that what I have to do?" she asked appealingly. "Give up?"

"Well, at least you have to learn how to be satisfied—some time in life you have to."

She nodded her head, smiling. "That means getting old, I suppose. I guess I'll just be a kid all my life. Because I go on ~~repeating~~ all the demands life makes of me. Isn't that the way all kids are?"

I said: "You certainly don't look like a kid."

"My mother says I'm wearing my hair wrong. She says it makes me look at least thirty."

"Oh, not as old as *that*!" I said.

"I don't care, anyway. I've been trying to change my personality but nothing works very well. I feel just the way I did when I first went to Europe."

"Have you been back to Paris?"

"No," she said. "But I'm thinking of stopping there on the way back. I'd kind of like to spend about a week there and see what it's like now. I'd even like to see Daniel."

I didn't care to comment on that, though I privately wondered whether she was ready for it. I was no longer suffering the confusion of dealing with two Lucys; the visual one had quietly disappeared. We were back on a familiar footing. I was with the Lucy I loved, and I was glad she hadn't changed beyond all recognition. There had been changes all right: more than she knew. And, in another sense, maybe fewer. Her seeing me again, out of context, probably made her revert to the girl she had been. I suspected her of indulging herself during this little reminiscent visit we would have together. The feeling of our former relationship had come back to us both at the same time. We had desired it, and achieved it. There was no way she would know that changes had taken place in my life, too. I didn't particularly want her to know: I could also indulge myself. I wanted, for an hour or so, perhaps, to support the illusion that we

were the same two people who had met in Paris. The Martinis were a help.

"What are you doing to-night?" she asked.

"Nothing at all. Can you stay in town for dinner?"

"Yes, I can. I brought Mother's car in so I can do whatever I like."

"Fine. Then let's have dinner."

"That would be so nice. There are some people at the British Embassy who keep hounding me but I'd like to put them off. That's what happens when you're a Countess." She laughed at herself and said: "Couldn't we eat at your place?"

Surprised I said: "Not very well. I don't think there's much there and also I'm moving so the place is in a mess."

"Oh, I don't care about that. Let's buy something and I'll cook——"

"All right, if you really want to."

"Sure, it would be fun. . . . I'll even stay all night."

"What?"

She laughed and pointed at me. "You're so easy to shock! *Are* you shocked? Isn't that silly? Haven't you always wanted me to stay all night with you?"

Now that she brought it out into the open, I wasn't at all sure that I ever had. I had always felt somehow outside the charmed circle of people who went to bed with Lucy. The shock I must have shown was not a moral one; it rose out of a feeling of incongruity.

I answered her very carefully: "I have a feeling our time has passed, Lucy. Three years ago was the time maybe—when we first met. Now I've gone and gotten myself involved. In fact, I'm going to be married. To that actress you liked so much—Isobel March."

"The one that was at your party in London? She was nice, she was really nice! Well, I hope you'll be very happy. . . . I guess I'll just have to shop around."

I said: "You're trying to play the lost lady."

"Is that what it is? Maybe. All I know is that everybody's so boring! My life is so stupid. Do you think I'm fitted for that kind of life in England? Whenever I see my name in the papers—the Countess of Basking—I say, Is that me? Of course it's not me. It's ridiculous and I don't know how it ever happened. I thought I was just marrying a sweet guy, and all I got was a *name*. . . ."

"Being happy is a problem, isn't it?" I said.

"You're just making fun of me. Oh, don't worry about me. I'm only talking this way because you're an old friend and because I'm home for the first time in years. It's upsetting, that's what it is. I'll go back and do the same things and have some more children. And David'll probably become very famous and I'll be proud of him. And no one will ever really know me."

"And you'll still be wanting something else."

"Right now I want another Martini."

We never got around to dinner, for some reason. At midnight we were still there at the bar, having made a meal of the popcorn and peanuts and potato chips the waiter kept placing on our table. I don't think we were disgracefully drunk at any point in the evening. It seemed to happen in spasms: we'd be suddenly euphoric, laughing and saying foolish things and seeing life microscopically clear. Then that would wear off, people near us would leave and new people arrive, and we'd become a little maudlin. At least three times during the evening we decided we had really been meant for each other, that'd we had missed the cue, and were lost to each other forever.

But in the end, it didn't seem to matter. What we firmly established was that we would always be able to enjoy each other. She was willing to trust me to remember her as she had been; that, she felt, would be a point of stability in her life. And I was willing to go on loving her as she had been. None of this would interfere with our private lives; we would never tell anyone else.

"And it'll all be so ethereal," she said. "Just because we won't ever go to bed."

Winky managed to be interested in my recounting of the meeting. It was my last week-end in New York before November first; after I had told her my story, I said, "Now when can we be married?"

"You sound as if you mean you've got her out of your system."

"Yes, she's out. For good."

Winky smiled. "She doesn't worry me, baby. She's too far away."

"*Much* too far. About three years away. That's a goodly distance."

"Oh, very goodly. But what did you say just before that?"

"Before what? Oh—about getting married? Yeh—what about getting a licence to-morrow?"

"On Saturday? Are they open?"

"We'll sure find out," I said. "They *must* be. Think of the hurry we're in."

"Okay," she said. "I'll get up early for a change. How long does it take for blood-tests and things?"

"I don't know. I'm very inexperienced. Who can ask?"

"I'll ask, honey. I'll ask one of the electricians to-morrow. . . . Say—you know who may be here in time for a wedding?"

"Who?"

"Croyden."

"Oh, God, no!"

"Oh, God, yes. He's finally decided the time has come for him to see New York—or vice versa."

"And he'll probably bring Marianne with him, too."

"Probably."

I had to laugh. "I never told you how I first met Marianne"

"Did I? Without the proper introductions or anything. It was at the Ritz in London. In the bar. I was sitting there minding my own business when this girl comes in, looks around, comes over to me and says, Aren't you George Macklin, or some name like that. I was just in the right mood to say yes. So she says, My name's Marianne Croyden, how do we do, we better hurry because the others are waiting. I didn't know what she was talking about but I paid my bill and I followed her.

"I thought it was a very strange pick-up, very neat, very clever, but that's the way life is, I told myself. Takes all kinds. We got into a cab and I thought she was taking me to some pink Mayfair flat. Only we stopped at Claridge's and went into a private dining-room. And there I met the others. It was a dinner-party somebody was giving for Croyden : I was supposed to be some American producer. I couldn't get out of it and I even enjoyed it. Shook everybody's hand and sat down and started eating like a fool. Until the real George Macklin came in a half-hour later. Funny-looking guy and a lot older than me. Naturally there was a whole lot of confusion and a beautiful exposure scene. I very charmingly confessed all—well, not quite all. But they were impressed by my credentials, and I guess they all thought it cute and American. They put down another place and red. Not one of them has ever mentioned it again, but how I happen to know the whole gang of them. . . ."

"Honey, why didn't you ever tell me before? It's the adventurous thing I've ever heard about you."

"Oh, I don't go around flaunting myself," I said.

"I know; you're silly that way. I've got a gorgeous —we ought to give a party for them when they come and if we can't get hold of this George Macklin and——"

"No," I said. "Let's not bother. You can't ever repeat things like that."

"Why not?"

"Let's forget them."

"Okay, baby. You seducer of strange girls."

"Let's forget everybody."

"I wish I'd seen her face when she realized. . . ."

I wanted to say to her, Come on, put on your hat and let's get a licence, the way I had planned it long ago when I knew I wasn't going to say it. I decided I would say it the next morning, and she would think I was trying to be funny. She wouldn't know quite what I meant.

But I would know.

THE END.